CORPSE PRINCESS

YOSHIICHI AKAHITO

CORPSE PRINCESS

THE TEN GREAT HOLY FAMILIES OF THE KOUGON SECT (TITLE)

Kamiu, Shiou, Takamine, Aragami, Tsuchikado, Aoi, Agemaki, Shirube, Guumiya, and Hoshimura.

These families maintain the bloodlines of the Kougon Sect's founder's ten top disciples. They've reliably produced superior monks above the soujou level for centuries, but this fact has naturally put strain on the system. The current and 65th Dai-soujou is Shinze Kamiu. He bears the title exclusively held by those of the dai-soujou rank, "Henjou Gongen," or "incarnation of universal illumination."

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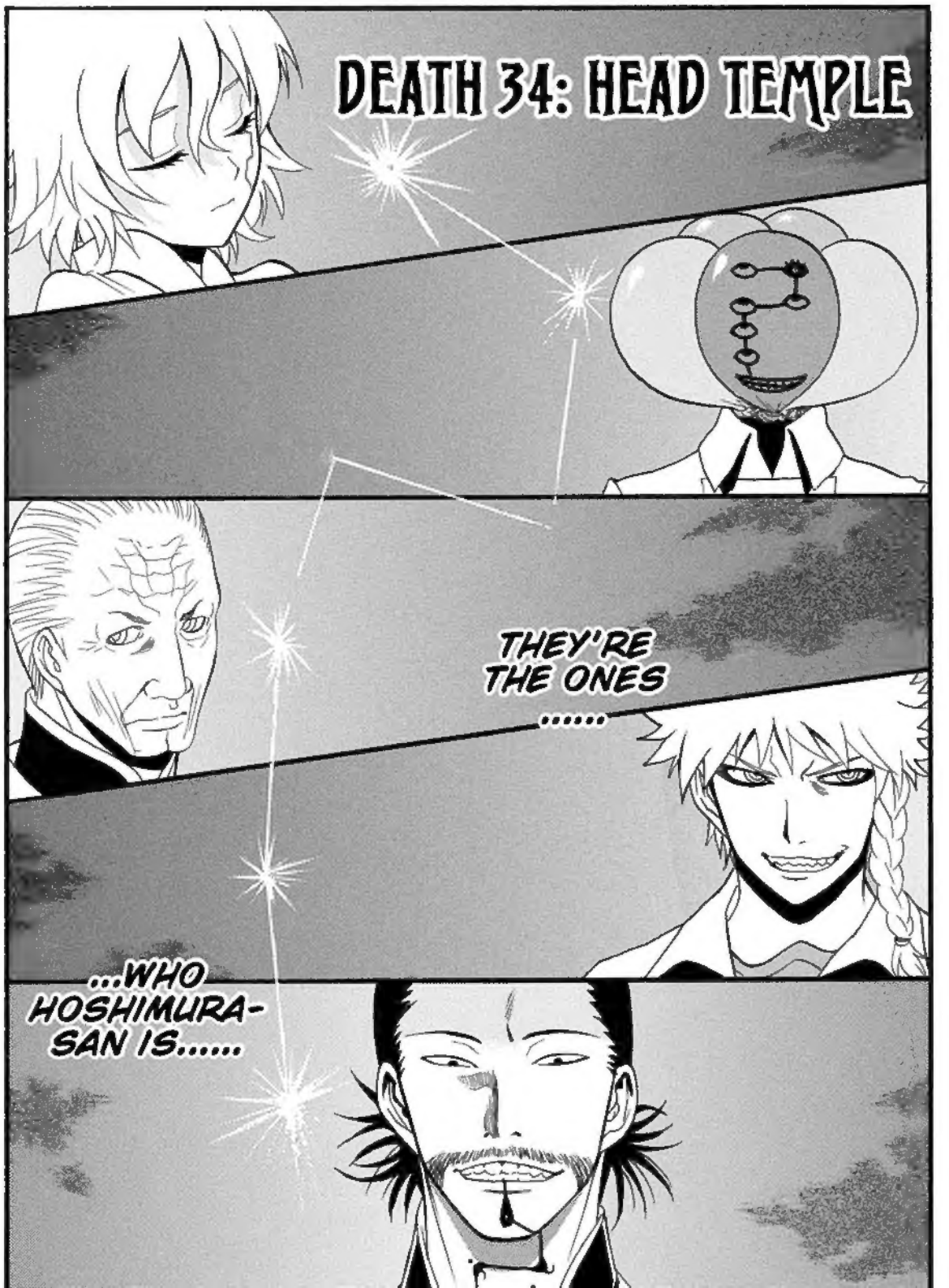
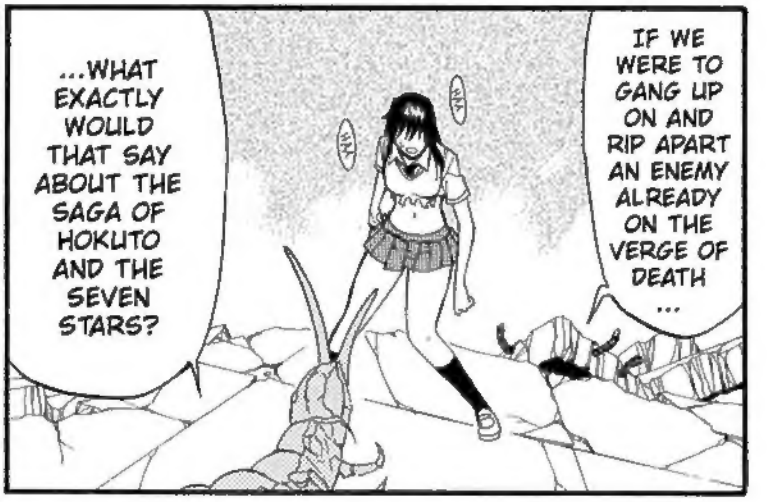


FWOOM
HAA.
HAA.
HAA.
HAA.
.....SO? WHAT'S OUR MOVE, HAZAMA?
ENA MAKES THE SECOND STAR THIS GIRL'S TAKEN OUT.
WHY NOT JUST KILL HER AND HAVE OUR REVENGE?
.....
HEH HEH.
NEVER.

WE EXIST TO FORETELL OF HOKUTO'S COMING.
BREATHE
すー
BREATHE
SHE IS THE PINNACLE OF SHIKABANE WHO'VE MOVED BEYOND "REGRET" AND ATTAINED "SAGA"..... THE SEVEN STARS EXIST TO MAKE KNOWN THE IDEAL THAT IS HOKUTO.

.....
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.


...WHAT EXACTLY WOULD THAT SAY ABOUT THE SAGA OF HOKUTO AND THE SEVEN STARS?
IF WE WERE TO GANG UP ON AND RIP APART AN ENEMY ALREADY ON THE VERGE OF DEATH ...

IT APPEARS WE HAVE ANOTHER PAIR OF UNWANTED GUESTS.
.....
WHAT'S MORE...

!

HUH ?

!
SENSEI !!
.....
IMPOS-SIBLE.
TO PENETRATE MY LOCALE WITHOUT MY KNOWLEDGE .....
FU-FU..... SORRY, SEVEN STARS.
YOU MIGHT SAY THAT SNEAKING INTO HIDDEN, SECRET PLACES IS MY GREATEST SKILL.
(THOUGH I MOSTLY USE IT TO GET INTO GIRLS' CHANGING ROOMS.)
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU SO PROUD OF, IDIOT?
DROP DEAD !!

POW
.....
THIS...
HAA.
HAA.
...ISN'T OVER YET..... SEVEN STARS.
!!
.....
HEH HEH.
WHAT'S THIS?
SQUIIRM
SUCH SPIRIT..... ALL OF A SUDDEN.
STRAIN
STRAIN
HMM?
MAKINA HOSHI-MURA.

TELL ME.
DID YOU THINK YOU WERE SAFE?

LIFT
SO YOU THOUGHT YOU'D MAKE ONE LAST EFFORT TO SHOW HOW TENACIOUS YOU ARE?
STRAIN
STRAIN
NOW THAT A PROTECTOR AND SOUJOU HAVE ARRIVED TO HELP... YOU WERE SURE YOU'D SURVIVE THIS?

SHRED
HMM ?

!!
DASH
MAKI
—
GAHH
.....
HAA.
STEP
HAH
!!
TURN
SEVEN
STARS
!!
SIX
REALMS
...
STOMP
!!

THUNK
!?
THUNK
THUNK
THUNK
THUNK
THUNK
THUNK
THUNK
A CAGE .....!?
THIS IS...!?
TWITCH
!!
THE OTHER..... IS GONE !?
!!

DON'T MOVE.
WHOOM

THEN MY EXORCIST HOLY SWORD, THE "FUDOU MYOU-OU BLADE" WILL CARVE OUT AND DESTROY YOUR WICKED "SAGA".....YOU SEVEN-STAR SCUM.
DROP THE GIRL AND RETREAT... IF YOU DON'T.....

KACHAK
KACHAK
TAUT
STAND

GRIND
KAHH HAA
IS IT BECAUSE YOU WORRY I MIGHT DEAL THIS GIRL A DEATH BLOW ON IMPULSE?
HEH HEH... WHAT AN ODD THING TO SAY, MONK.
WHY NOT JUST FINISH ME?
...

HEH-HEH-HEH.....SO FOOLISH. YOU HOPE TO SAVE EVERYONE?
OR IS IT..... THAT THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THIS CORPSE PRINCESS?

HOWEVER, MONK...
I'VE NO INTEREST IN YOU AT THE MOMENT.
RATHER, THE ONE I'VE GOT MY EYE ON IS .....
.....

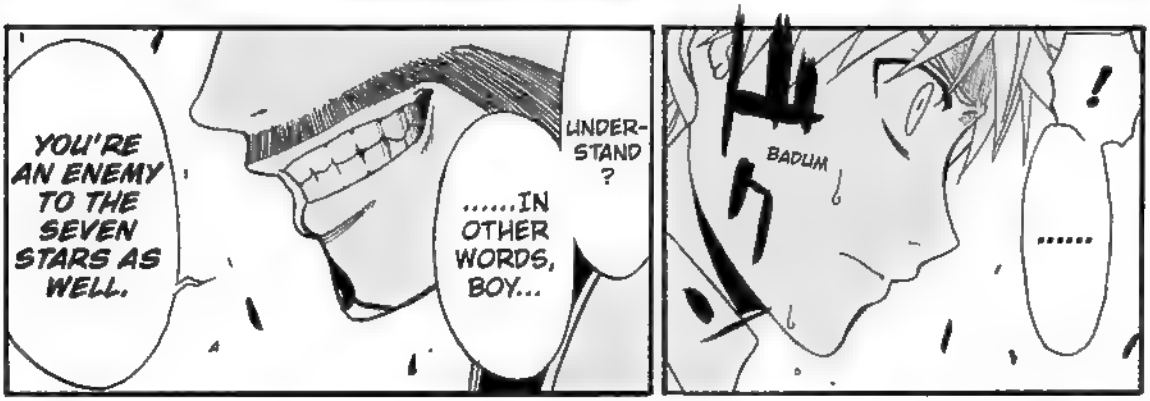
JOLT
!!

HEY THERE... BOY.
QUITE THE BOND WE HAVE, IT SEEMS.

CLENCH
I WISH..... I COULD AT LEAST HELP SAVE HOSHIMURA-SAN.....
CRAP..... I GET WHAT'S GOING ON, BUT IT'S GOT ME SCARED STIFF.....

WE'VE GOT A NEW TYPE OF "BOND" NOW.
CRACK
HOWEV-ER..... BOY...
.....

MAKINA HOSHIMURA HAS KILLED ENA AND BECOME OUR ENEMY.
.....AND YOU, BOY, ARE MAKINA HOSHIMURA'S CONTRACTING MONK.


!
.....
BADUM
UNDER-STAND ?
.....IN OTHER WORDS, BOY...
YOU'RE AN ENEMY TO THE SEVEN STARS AS WELL.

THERE'S NO GOING BACK FOR YOU NOW.
UNTIL THIS BOND IS BROKEN... YOU'LL BE FORCED TO FIGHT US TO THE DEATH ALONGSIDE THE GIRL.
.....CAN YOU COMPREHEND THAT?

.....
SPLENDID..... HOLD ON TO THAT DETERMINATION UNTIL WE NEXT MEET, BOY.
AT LEAST UNTIL THEN.

...OF COURSE.
I DON'T NEED YOU TO TELL ME THAT..... I'M PREPARED .....

HMPH... SO BOOR-ISH.
I HAVEN'T FORGOT-TEN.
BUT AS A MONK, ISN'T IT YOUR DUTY TO SAVE OTHERS?

..... FEEL FREE TO RUN YOUR MOUTH, BUT ...
...DON'T FORGET THAT WHETHER OR NOT YOU EVEN HAVE A "NEXT TIME" DEPENDS ON MY BLADE.

AHH...
SQUEEZE

!?
JUST LIKE..... THIS CORPSE PRIN-CESS.
WHOOSH

!!
YOU .....
CRAP .....
DASH
HOSHI-MU—
WOBBLE
!?
THUD
SPLAT
!?
... EH?
BLUB
...!
ARE YOU SHOCKED ?
IT'S ONLY NATU-RAL.

IT WAS BOUND TO TURN OUT THIS WAY, WAS IT NOT?
TO SAY NOTHING..... OF ONE WITH A CURSE WHO BATTLES OPPONENTS STRONGER THAN HERSELF.
UHH...

COUGH
DEPENDING ON HER STATE, THAT AURA CAN BE EXHAUSTED QUITE RAPIDLY .....
A CORPSE PRINCESS IS BOUND TO A CONTRACTING MONK, AND SHE DRAWS LIFE ENERGY, OR "AURA," FROM HIM IN ORDER TO LIVE.

THE NIGHT WHEN I MADE MY CONTRACT WITH HOSHIMURA-SAN.....
JUST LIKE, BACK THEN .....
PETTA

IS IT... MINE...?

STAINED
.....
BLOOD.....

SHUDDER
SHUDDER
FROM MY LEGS..... ARMS..... AND HEAD TOO.
LIKE ALL THE STRENGTH IS DRAINING FROM THE CELLS IN MY BODY.....

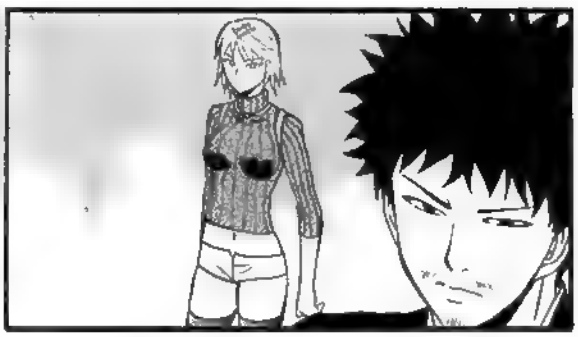
WELL..... WHAT WILL YOU DO, MONK?
KILL ME? SAVE HER? .....A SIMPLE CHOICE, NO?
...
HEH HEH.
IF YOU'RE VOMITING BLOOD, YOU'LL SOON RUN OUT OF AURA ALTOGETHER .....

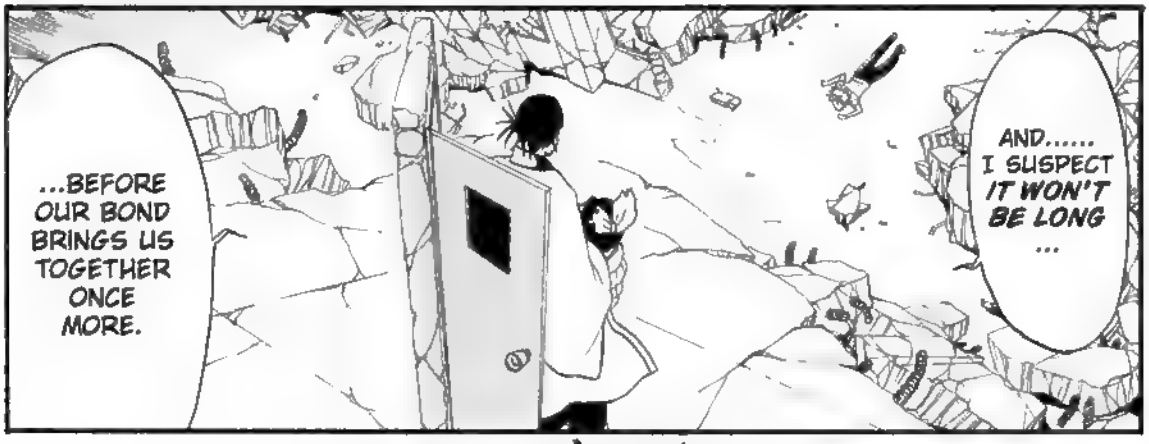
!!
MASTER!!
WHOOSH
SHING
CHIK

BUT ...
SURE THING, SEVEN STARS. THIS IS..... A TIE.
FUDOU KYOU-OU KONGOU BLADE

!
MY COMPASSION'S THE ONLY REASON YOU GET TO WALK AWAY FROM THIS.
SLICE
HAA.
HAA.
HAA...
.....
AS YOU WISH.
THIS GUY .....
CREAK
CREAK
AHH..... YES.
ONE LAST WARNING... OR RATHER, A PROMISE.
SNAP
TCH! SERIOUSLY? IT'S ALREADY OVER?

...WILL HAVE ENGULFED THIS WORLD ON A CATACLYSMIC SCALE.
WHEN NEXT WE MEET, THE LAND OF THE DEAD TESTED HERE— NEEDED TO REVITALIZE OUR KING—
MOST LIKELY ...
...?
THAT SAID..... HEH-HEH-HEH.
THE WORLD..... WILL LOSE ALL MEANING OF "LIVING" AND "DEAD" .....
YOUR BONDS AND JUSTICE WILL DISSOLVE AND BE CORRUPTED. .....IN THE END...
DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR LIFE FOR NOTHING.
SURVIVE..... SO THAT YOU AND THE GIRL CAN EXPIRE IN A WAY BEFITTING THE COMING OF THE SEVEN STARS.
YOU MUST ENDURE, BOY.

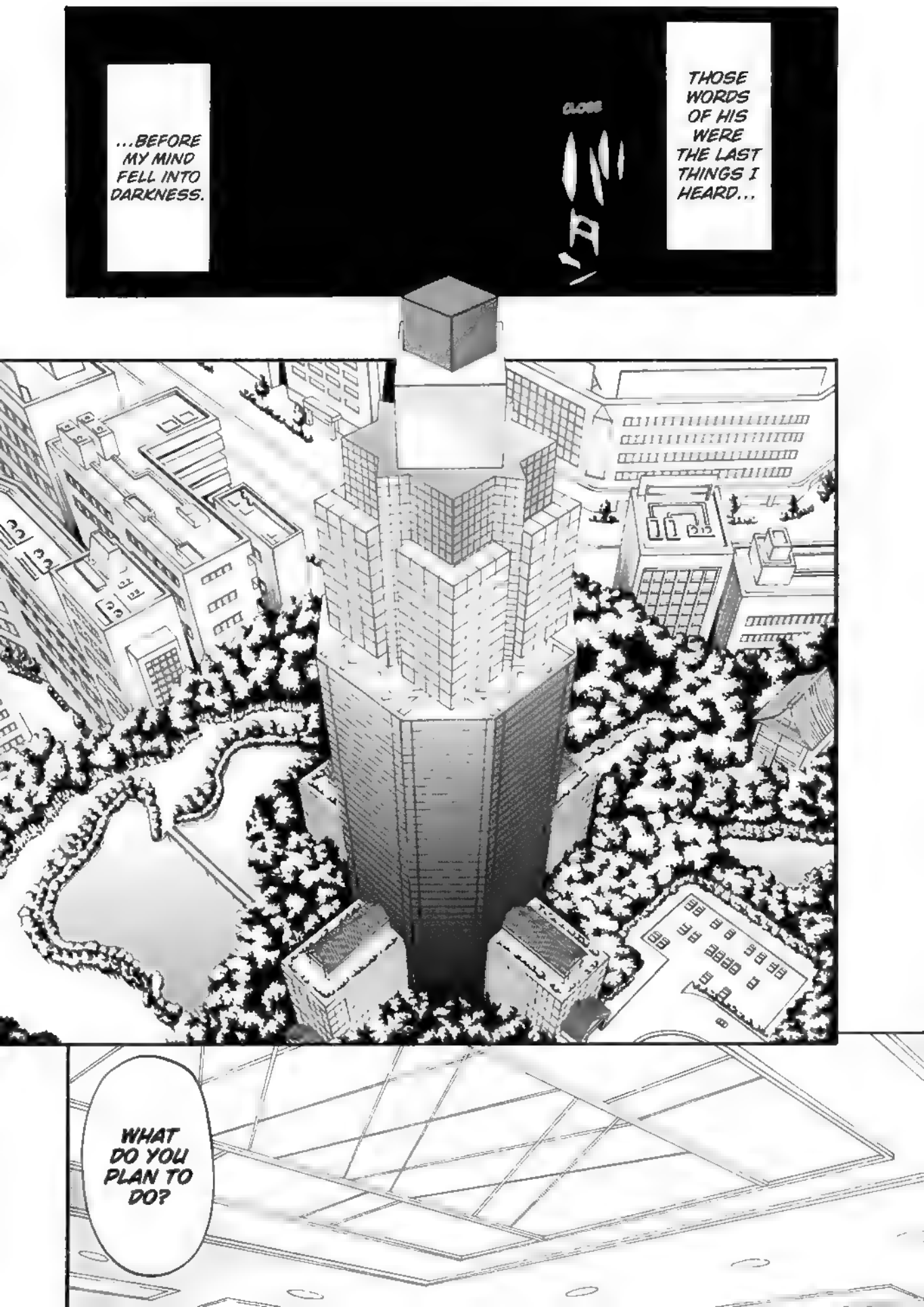



...BEFORE OUR BOND BRINGS US TOGETHER ONCE MORE.
AND..... I SUSPECT IT WON'T BE LONG ...

IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL, THEY'LL DRAW YOU IN.
KEEP AWAY FROM THOSE WITH THE SHADOW OF DEATH.
CREAK

SO..... UNTIL THEN, BOY.
CREAK

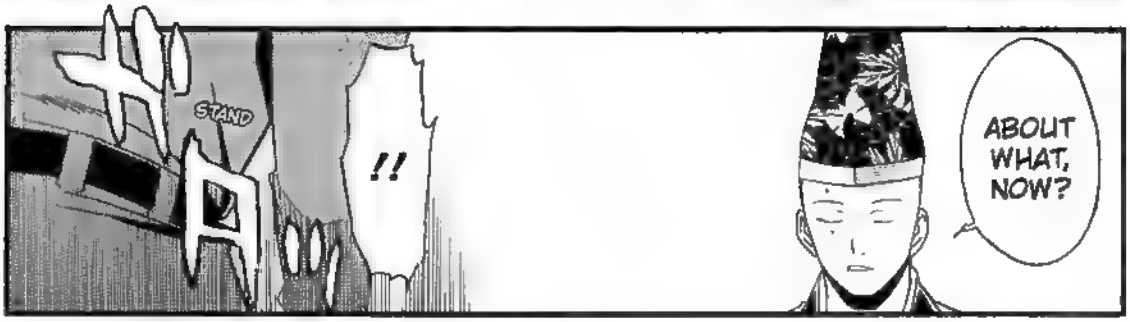
HEH HEH.
VALUE YOUR OWN LIFE.


...BEFORE MY MIND FELL INTO DARKNESS.
CLOSE
THOSE WORDS OF HIS WERE THE LAST THINGS I HEARD...
WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO?

THIS INCIDENT... AND THE CLEANUP INVOLVED .....

SIP
SIP

GONDAI-SOUJOU, TOKIHANA SHIOU-DONO.
YOU SUPERVISE THE KOUGON SECT, SO WE'D LIKE TO HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE MATTER.

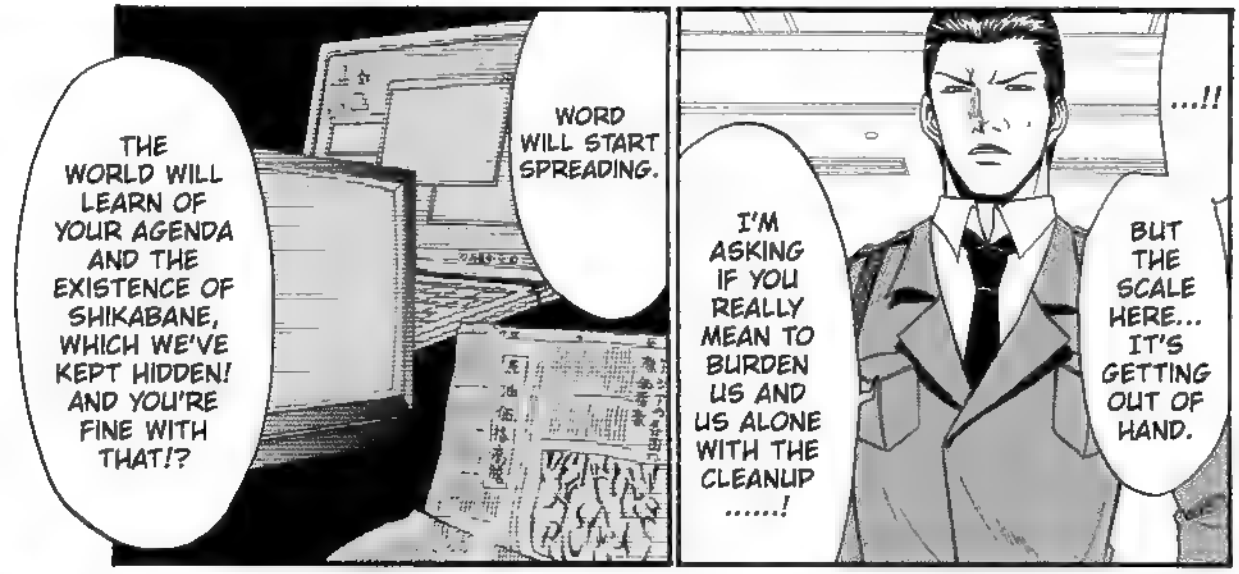

STAND
!!
ABOUT WHAT, NOW?

IF THIS ESCALATES ANY FURTHER, WE AT THE POLICE WON'T BE ABLE TO COVER IT UP!!

...
CLUNK

THERE WERE FAR TOO MANY WITNESSES !!
SLAM
DON'T PLAY DUMB!! ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AT IKAI HIGH SCHOOL YESTERDAY !!

I DON'T REMEMBER THE KOUGON SECT EVER ASKING YOU TO COVER ANYTHING UP, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GENERAL-DONO.
.....FRANKLY...
GLARE


THE WORLD WILL LEARN OF YOUR AGENDA AND THE EXISTENCE OF SHIKABANE, WHICH WE'VE KEPT HIDDEN! AND YOU'RE FINE WITH THAT!?
WORD WILL START SPREADING.
I'M ASKING IF YOU REALLY MEAN TO BURDEN US AND US ALONE WITH THE CLEANUP .....!
...!!
BUT THE SCALE HERE... IT'S GETTING OUT OF HAND.

VERY WELL .....
THEN I WILL STATE MY OPINION ON THE MATTER.
GOVERNOR... ARE YOU OF A SIMILAR OPINION?
.....I SEE.
I'M RELYING ON YOUR WISDOM HERE, GONDAI-SOUJOU SHIOU .....
NO..... I.....

INDEED..... OUR ENEMY HAS BEEN ACTIVE AS OF LATE..... AND THIS IS MOST LIKELY JUST THE BEGINNING.
HOWEVER... WE WILL WITHOUT A DOUBT DESTROY THE SHIKABANE OF THE UNCLEAN BUNCH.
THE KOUGON SECT'S VERY DOGMA IS AT STAKE..... WE WILL TAKE WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY !!

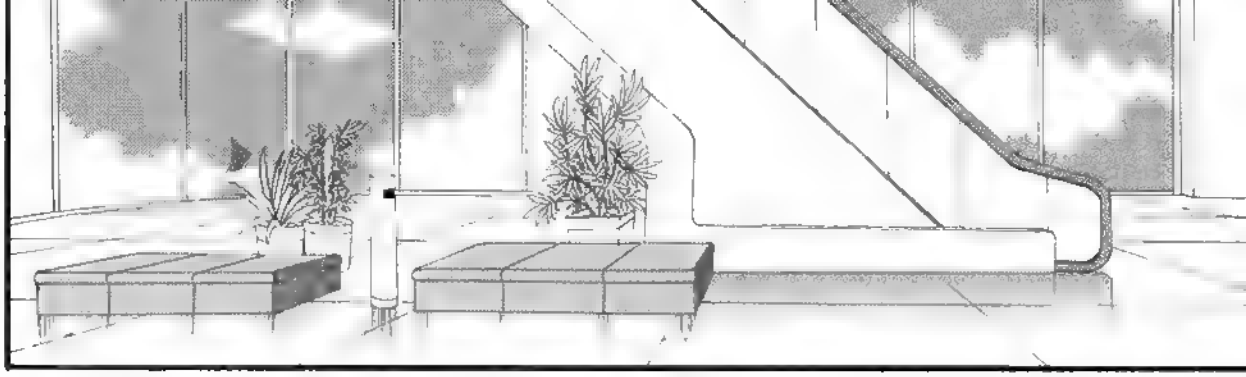
NOTHING ELSE MATTERS !!
EVEN IF IT MEANS THAT OUR SECRETS BECOME PUBLIC KNOWL-EDGE...
IN THE FACE OF A SHIKABANE THREAT, WE WILL NOT WAVER IN THE SLIGHTEST IN OUR CRUSADE TO PROTECT ALL OF CREATION !!

...!!
OF COURSE..... I HOPE THAT OUR MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP CAN CONTINUE. JUST AS IT ALWAYS HAS.....
..... THAT IS ALL.

HMPH..... MY, MY .....
EXPLAINING THE JUSTNESS OF THE BATTLE TO THE PEACE-ADDLED IS TIRING WORK..... TAKAMINE.
..... YES.
... INCI-DEN-TALLY ...
TAP
TAP
HOW ARE THINGS GOING? ..... WITH THE HOSHIMURA GIRL?

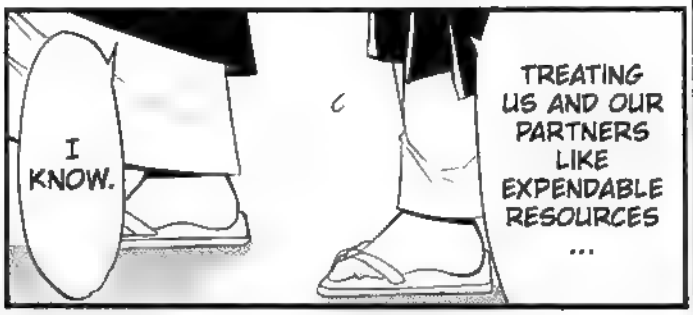
I UNDERSTAND SHE OPPOSED THE SEVEN STARS AND DEMONSTRATED RESULTS BEYOND HER SUPPOSED CAPABILITIES ?
YES, BUT .....
AS A RESULT, SHE AND HER CONTRACTING MONK ARE NOW RECEIVING TREATMENT FROM RIKA FOR THEIR WOUNDS.

I SEE..... DON'T LET THEM DIE FOR NOTHING.
SUCH FIGHTING POTENTIAL... WILL BE QUITE AN ASSET WHEN THE TIME COMES.
..... YES.
YOUR EMINENCE.

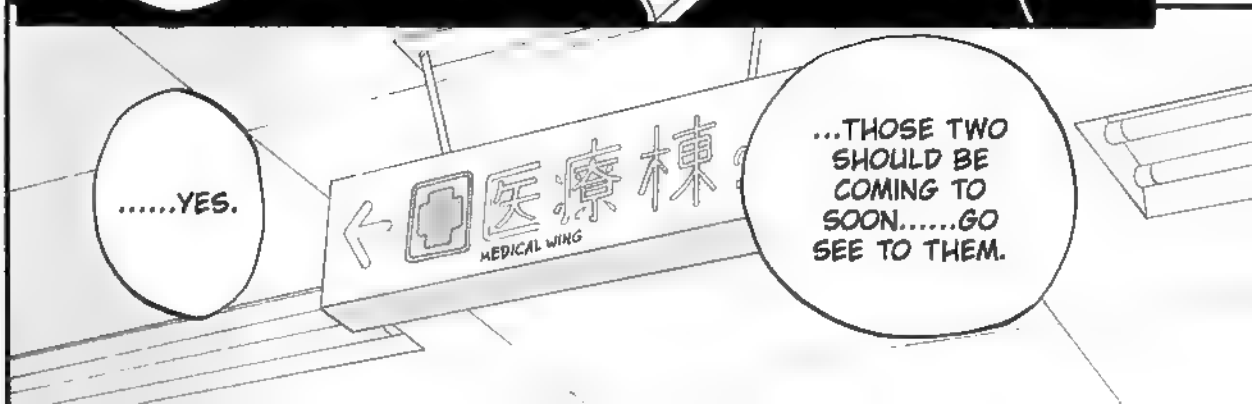


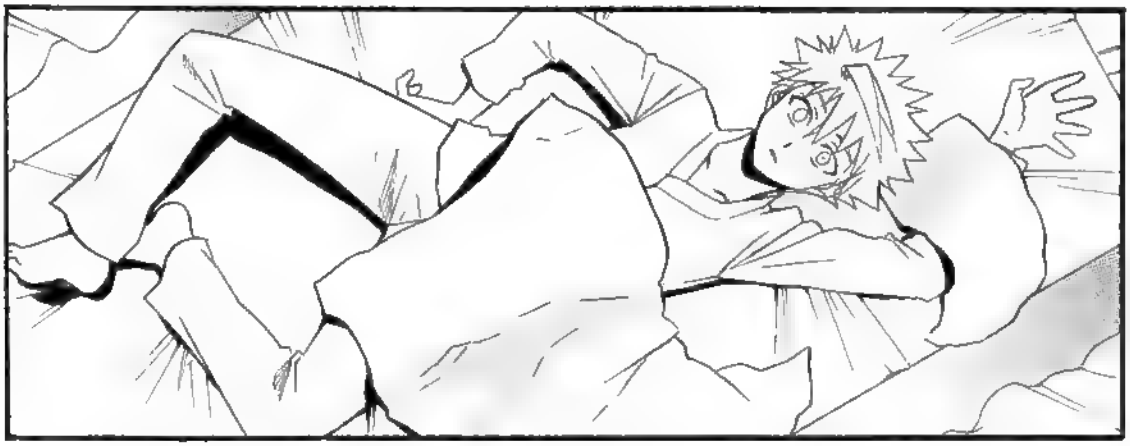
IF I MAY BE SO BLUNT..... I DON'T AGREE WITH IT.
ALL OF THAT..... WHAT THE GONDAI-SOUJOU-SAMA JUST SAID.....

TAKA-MINE-SAMA.


I KNOW.
TREATING US AND OUR PARTNERS LIKE EXPENDABLE RESOURCES ...

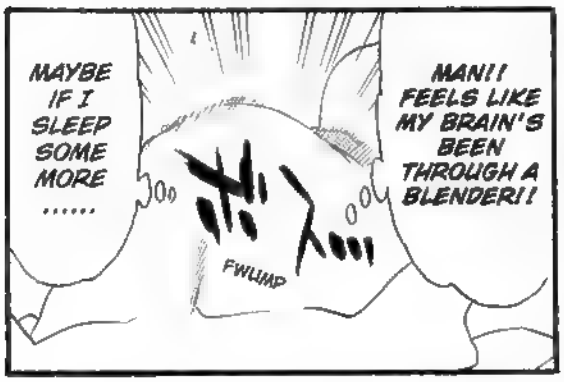
THAT'S WHY..... WE—WHO ARE MUCH CLOSER TO THE BATTLEFIELD —MUST TAKE WHAT THEY SAY WITH A GRAIN OF SALT.
BUT OFTEN, THOSE AT THE TOP OF ORGANIZATION HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO MAKE DECISIONS BASED ON THE NUMBERS.
EVEN IF IT'S PAINFUL FOR US.

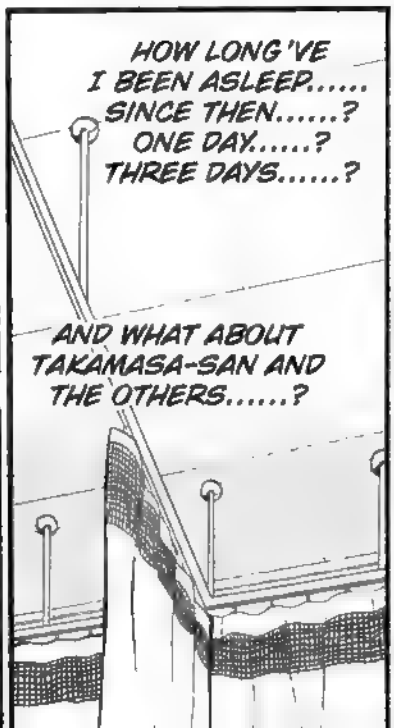

.....YES.
医療棟
MEDICAL WING
...THOSE TWO SHOULD BE COMING TO SOON.....GO SEE TO THEM.



OW .....
RIGHT. DIDN'T I..... COLLAPSE .....?
.....
...A HOSPI-TAL ?

THANK GOODNESS..... SHE MADE IT OUT ALIVE.....
HOSHI-MURA... SAN.
LOOKS LIKE SHE HAS A FEVER, THOUGH .....


MAYBE IF I SLEEP SOME MORE .....
FWUMP
MAN!! FEELS LIKE MY BRAIN'S BEEN THROUGH A BLENDER!!

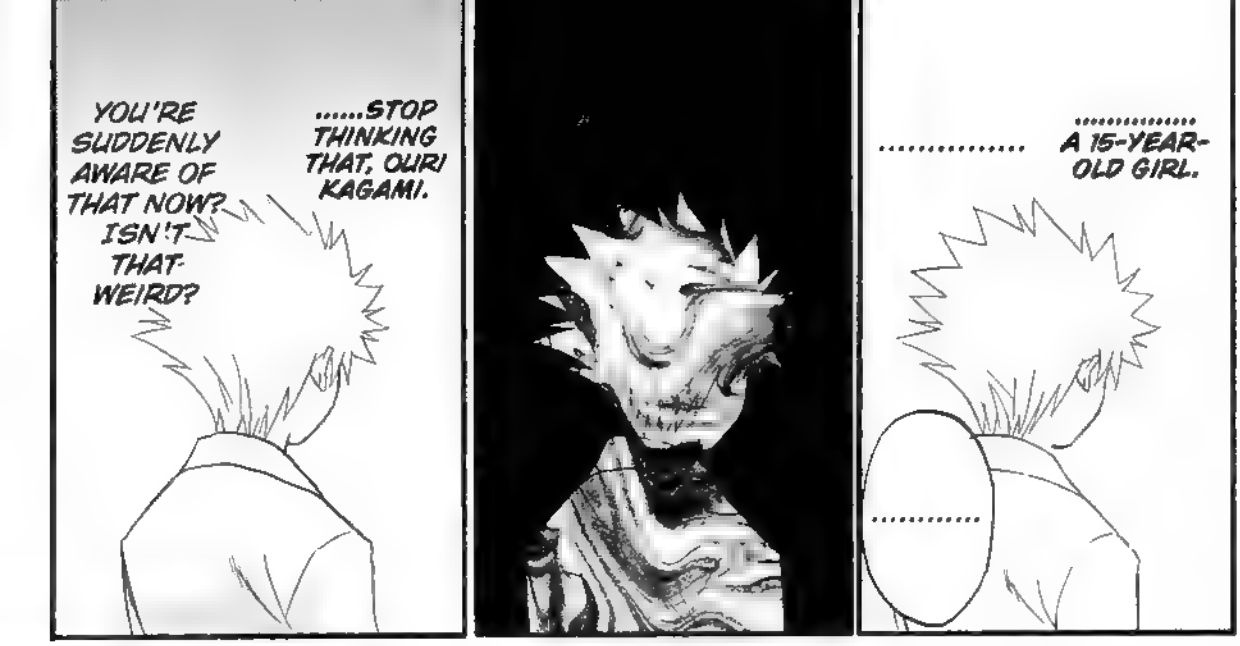

HOW LONG 'VE I BEEN ASLEEP..... SINCE THEN.....? ONE DAY.....? THREE DAYS.....?
AND WHAT ABOUT TAKAMASA-SAN AND THE OTHERS.....?

FWUMP
.....

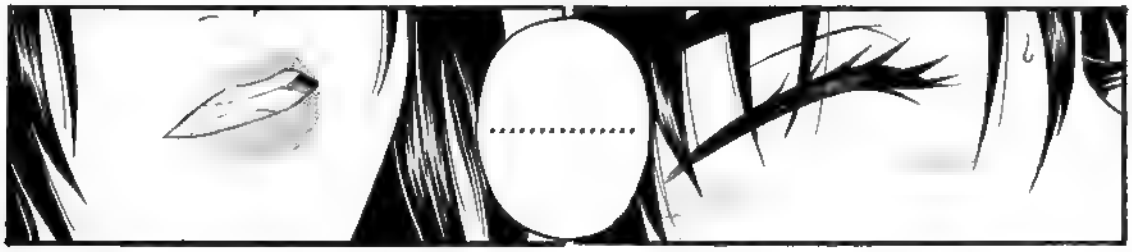
UHHH .....
..... UHH.

VWH
HO— HOSHI-MURA-SAN!?
ARE..... ARE YOU IN PAIN!?
!!
RISE
!!!!!!
.....!
A DREAM .....!?
THRASH
TCH .....
SEVEN... STARS .....
UHH .....
AT LEAST SHE'S NOT IN PAIN. THAT'S GOOD, IN A WAY .....
..... SO SHE'S HAVING A NIGHTMARE .....

...
AND SHE JUST MET THEM AGAIN, FACE-TO-FACE.....
IT MAKES SENSE..... THOSE GUYS KILLED HER..... AND HER WHOLE FAMILY.....
TREMBLE
THE SEVEN STARS.
UNTIL THIS BOND IS BROKEN... YOU'LL BE FORCED TO FIGHT US TO THE DEATH ALONGSIDE THE GIRL.
YOU'RE AN ENEMY TO THE SEVEN STARS AS WELL.
THERE'S NO GOING BACK FOR YOU NOW.
.....IN OTHER WORDS, BOY...
THERE'S NO GOING BACK FOR YOU NOW.....
SHUDDER
ON THE INSIDE, SHE'S STILL A 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL, A YEAR YOUNGER THAN ME, EVEN.....
NO MATTER HOW STRONG SHE IS.....
AND SHE'S TRYING TO BEAR THAT BURDEN..... BUT...
A FIGHT TO THE DEATH AGAINST THOSE GUYS .....


YOU'RE SUDDENLY AWARE OF THAT NOW? ISN'T THAT WEIRD?
.....STOP THINKING THAT, OURI KAGAMI.
.....
.....
A 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL.
.....

I MEAN, HOSHIMURA-SAN IS.....


.....

HOSHIMURA-SAN... WITH THOSE LONG EYELASHES..... AND WHEN SHE'S ASLEEP, SHE'S AS PEACEFUL AS A CHILD.....
INTERNAL CONFLICT POSE
.....NO, BUT..... I GUESS I NEVER NOTICED BECAUSE SHE'S ALWAYS SO PISSED AT ME THAT I CAN BARELY LOCK EYES WITH HER (LOSER).

AND ALSO.....
I'VE ALWAYS WONDERED— DOES SHE WEAR THAT SHORT SKIRT BECAUSE SHE'S GOT SOME AWESOME PANTIES THAT SHE WOULDN'T MIND PEOPLE GETTING A PEEK AT? LET'S FIND OUT.
YEAH.
!?
WHOAAHHAH...
LEAP
SPIN
SPIN
SKID

!?
!?
I'M GLAD YOU'RE FEELING BETTER... OURI KAGAMI-KUN.
AHEM.
..... YOU'RE HEALING UP NICELY.

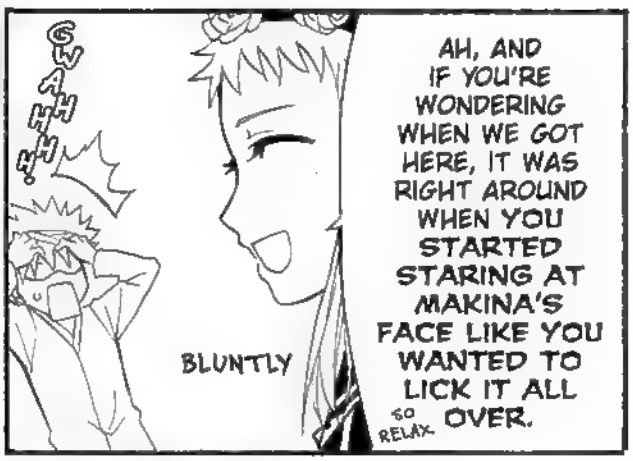
..... PARDON ME.
I SHOULD HAVE IN-TRODUCED MYSELF.

!
IT'S HER.....
WAIT .....?

EH?
AH...
WHO'RE .....

I'M SAKI, A CORPSE PRINCESS.
BOTH BROTHER TAGAMI AND I STUDIED UNDER TAKAMINE-SENSEI. WE WERE DISCIPLES TOGETHER.
I'M RIKA ARAGAMI. GON-SOUJOU AND DOCTOR ASSIGNED TO THE HEAD TEMPLE.
I'VE BEEN MAKINA-CHAN'S DOCTOR FOR A WHILE NOW.

OH. IT LOOKS LIKE MAKINA-CHAN STILL CAN'T WAKE UP YET.
UHH..... UMM.....
GUNYAHHH.


GYAHH!!
AH, AND IF YOU'RE WONDERING WHEN WE GOT HERE, IT WAS RIGHT AROUND WHEN YOU STARTED STARING AT MAKINA'S FACE LIKE YOU WANTED TO LICK IT ALL OVER.
BLUNTLY
SO RELAX.

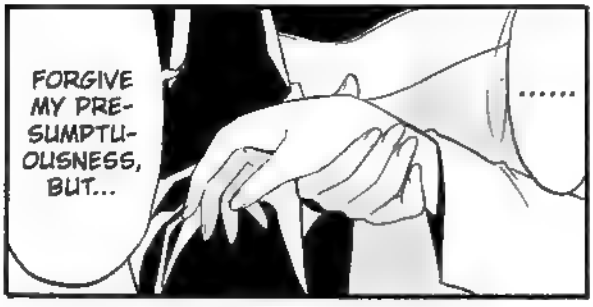
...NOTHING WE DO CAN WAKE HER FROM THIS DEATHLIKE SLUMBER.
HER MIND AND BODY ARE BOTH IN A DEEP SLEEP.
IT'S A SLEEP FAR BEYOND THE KIND THAT RESULTS FROM SIMPLE INJURIES AND EXHAUSTION... IN THIS CASE...

EH?
?
IS IT OVER...?

WRING

IT'S BECAUSE OF HER CURSE. SHE OVERUSED THAT POWER.
IN ORDER TO DESTROY THE ENEMY..... MAKINA-CHAN'S CURSE USED UP BOTH HER OWN STAMINA AND YOUR AURA.....

CONSID-ERING THIS SORT OF RISK...
...IS THAT CURSE REALLY WORTH IT?

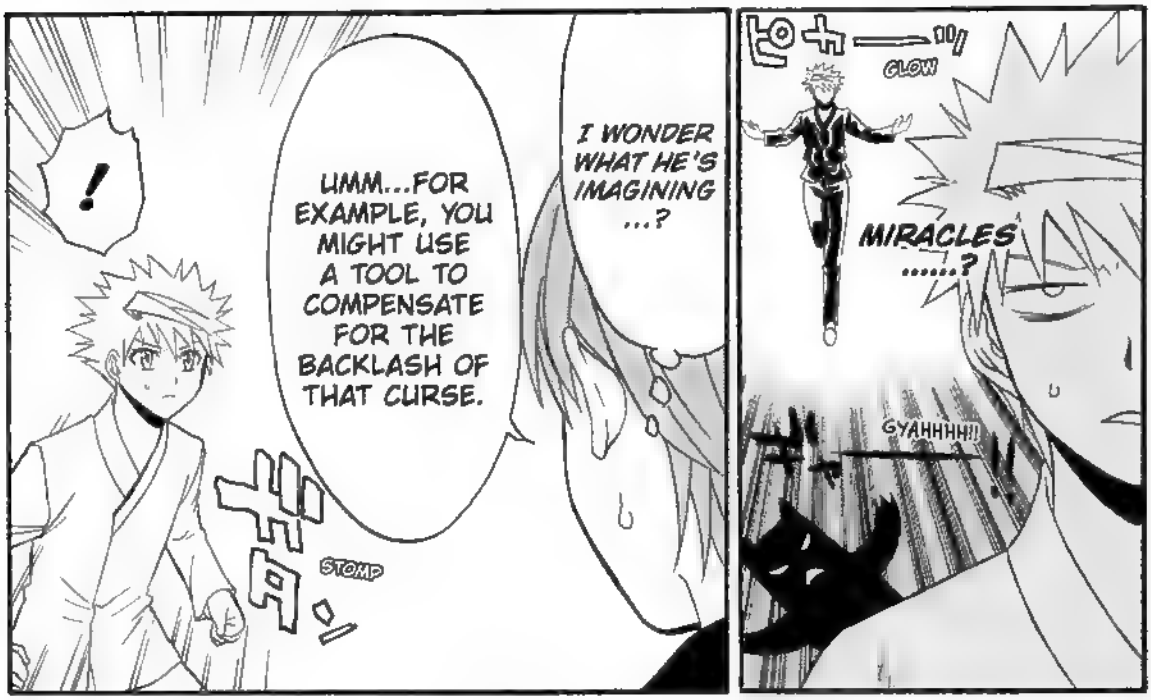

.....
FORGIVE MY PRE-SUMPTU-OUSNESS, BUT...

.....
RIGHT.
BUT IF THIS IS THAT PATH HOSHIMURA-SAN IS TAKING TO ACHIEVE HER GOALS.....
...THEN I'LL HAPPILY WALK IT WITH HER AS A TRIBUTE TO MY BIG BRO.

YOU WERE BOTH LUCKY THAT SHE FAINTED BEFORE EXHAUSTING ALL OF HER POWER, I SUSPECT.
BUT THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES FOR NEXT TIME..... SO...

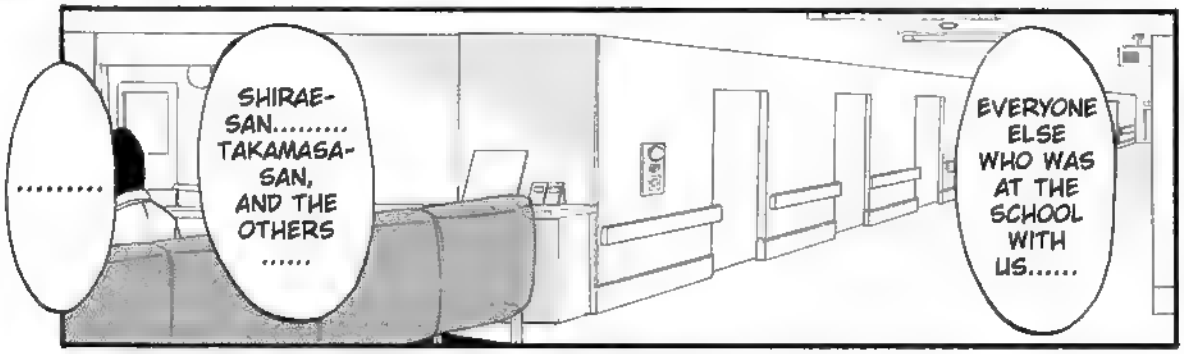
I KNOW WHO HE GETS THAT STUBBORN STREAK FROM.....
IS THAT RIGHT..... THEN YOU CAN FEEL FREE TO CONSIDER ME YOUR BACKUP.
PLEASE UNDER-STAND THAT!!
... PRE-PARE ?
I WAS ACTUALLY ORDERED BY SOUJOU TAKAMINE TO HELP YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR CONTRACTING MONK DUTIES.
EH?
...TO DETERMINE YOUR VERY OWN PATRON DEITY!
YES! THAT IS, TO FIND YOU SOME RITUAL TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT TO HELP YOU IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SHIKABANE..... AND...

PATRON... DEITY?
YES..... PEOPLE LIVE AND ARE PROTECTED BY THE GRACE OF THESE LIFE-AFFIRMING DEITIES.
BY DISCOVERING YOURS AND BECOMING AWARE OF IT, YOU CAN FORM A BOND AND BORROW ITS POWER.
ESTABLISHING THAT BOND ALLOWS CONTRACTING MONKS AND WARRIOR MONKS ALIKE...
GOLDEN CLAWED FIST!!
SEALED MANDALA RELEASE...
SIX REALMS EXORCISM.
...TO MASTER ABILITIES AND PERFORM TECHNIQUES THAT NEARLY AMOUNT TO EARTHLY MIRACLES.


I WONDER WHAT HE'S IMAGINING ...?
UMM...FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MIGHT USE A TOOL TO COMPENSATE FOR THE BACKLASH OF THAT CURSE.
!
STOMP
GLOW
MIRACLES .....?
GYAHHHH!!

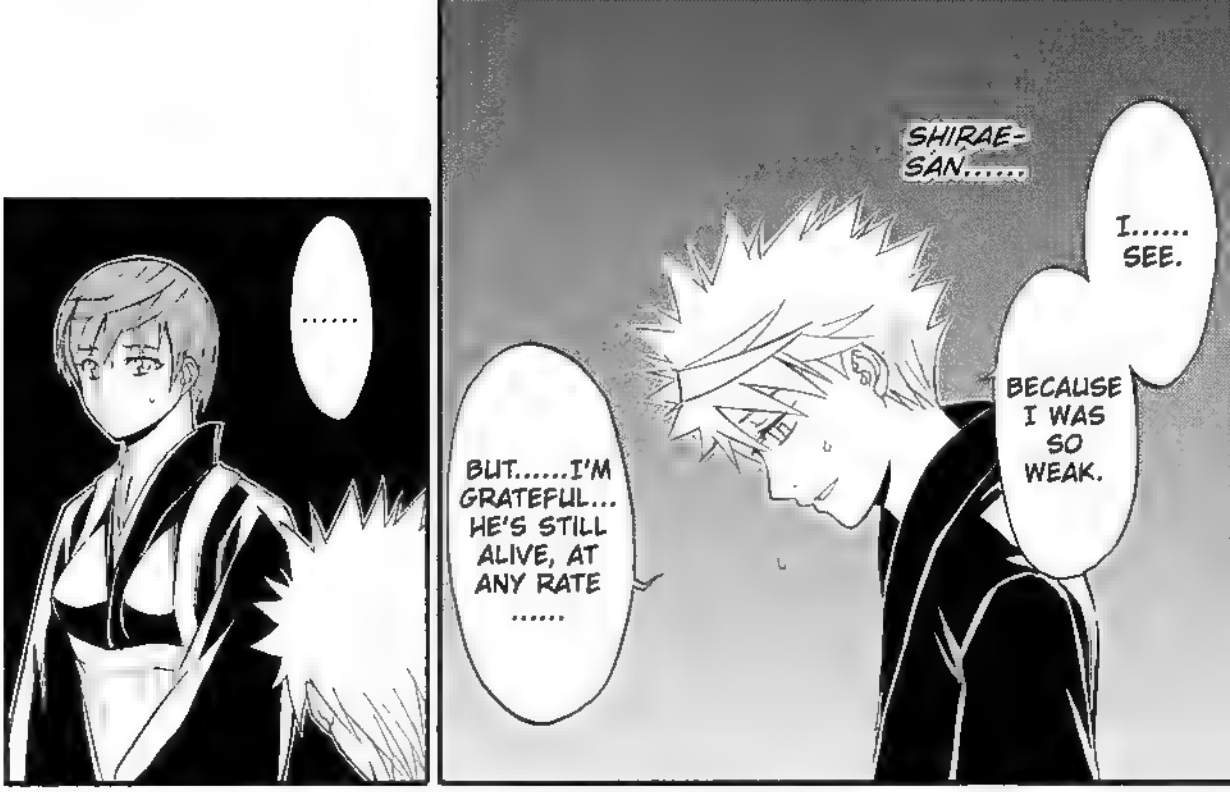
I'LL DO IT!!
I MEAN .....
HELP ME DO IT! PLEASE!!

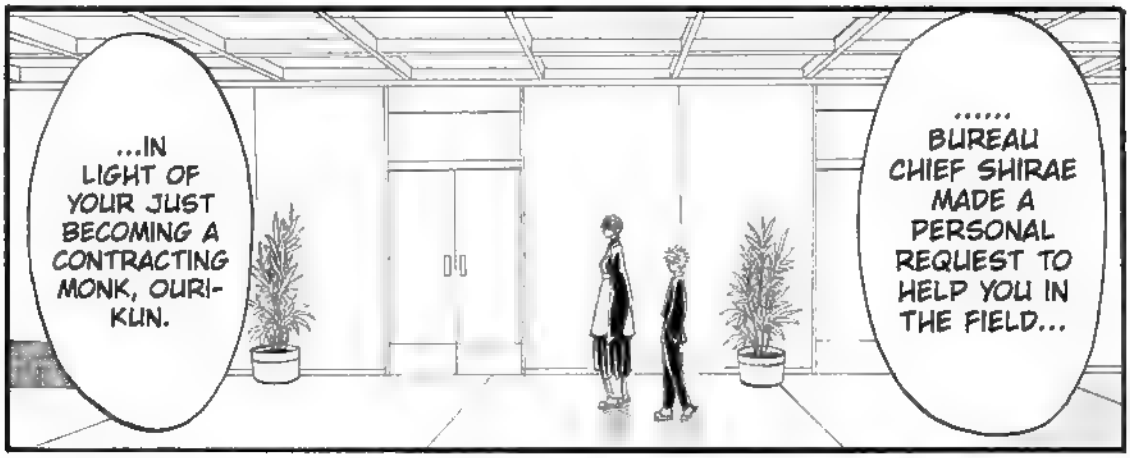
OF COURSE..... IF YOU'RE THAT WILLING, OURI-KUN ...
WE CAN DO IT RIGHT NOW.
GREAT!
OH..... BUT I'VE GOT ONE QUESTION, FIRST.....
WHAT IS IT?


EVERYONE ELSE WHO WAS AT THE SCHOOL WITH US.....
SHIRAE-SAN..... TAKAMASA-SAN, AND THE OTHERS .....
.....

SOUJOU UMEHARA AND SHOU-SOUJOU "GENPAKU" TAKAMASA ARE JUST FINE. THEY'VE RETURNED TO THEIR PROTECTORATE TO WORK ON STRATEGY.
.....

HE SURVIVED, BUT WITH THOSE WOUNDS, I CAN'T SAY..... WHEN HE'LL RECOVER.
..... BUT BUREAU CHIEF SHIRAE .....


SHIRAE-SAN.....
I..... SEE.
BECAUSE I WAS SO WEAK.
BUT.....I'M GRATEFUL... HE'S STILL ALIVE, AT ANY RATE .....
.....


.....
BUREAU CHIEF SHIRAE MADE A PERSONAL REQUEST TO HELP YOU IN THE FIELD...
...IN LIGHT OF YOUR JUST BECOMING A CONTRACTING MONK, OURI-KUN.

.....
RIGHT !

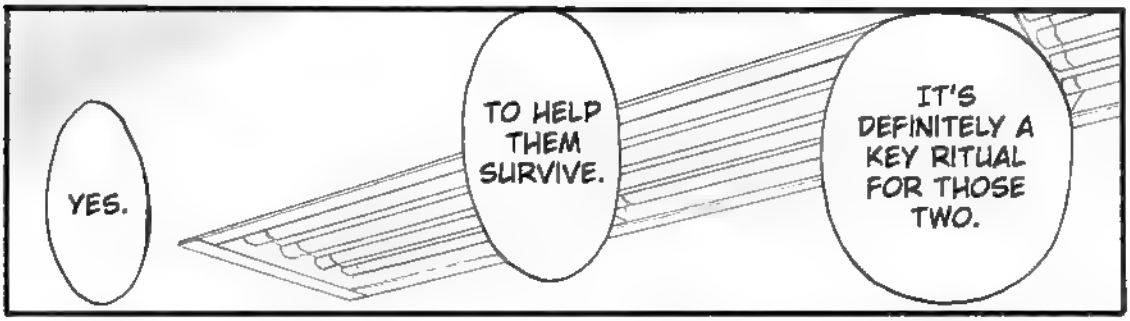
SMILE =ﾉ)

BUT..... ONCE YOU BOND WITH YOUR PATRON DEITY AND ACQUIRE THE STRENGTH NEEDED TO FIGHT WITH MAKINA-CHAN...
...I'M SURE HIS LOAD WILL BE CONSIDERABLY LESSENED.

CREAK
FORMING THIS BOND WILL PROBE THE TRUE NATURE OF YOUR ABILITIES AND TALENTS.
UNDERSTAND THAT, AND TRY NOT TO GET TOO RILED UP.
GOT IT!
RIGHT.....
WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF... THAT COMES FIRST...
BAM
FOR HOSHIMURA-SAN..... AND SHIRAE-SAN..... AND EVERYONE.....
SO I CAN PROTECT THEM ALL!!

IF EVERYTHING'S GOING WELL, HE SHOULD BE "FINDING HIMSELF" BEYOND THOSE GATES ABOUT NOW.
FWUMP
PER-HAPS... YES.

REALLY ?
MASTER. OURI'S WOKEN UP.


YES.
TO HELP THEM SURVIVE.
IT'S DEFINITELY A KEY RITUAL FOR THOSE TWO.

.....
SOMETIME SOON, PROBABLY.
THERE'LL COME A DAY.....WHEN WE WON'T BE THERE TO SAVE THEM LIKE WE DID THIS TIME.....

TAKA-MASA.
YES?
WE'VE GOTTEN AN EDICT. ME..... YOU... AND SOME OTHERS .....
THEY'RE CALLING THE MISSION "OPERATION SEALED DEITY."
IT'S A PLAN TO ASSASSINATE THE UNCLEAN BUNCH'S KING.

SKETCH-FROM-MEMORY CHAMPIONSHIP: SPECIAL EDITION!!

THE ASSISTANTS AND I WENT BOWLING!
WE EACH STOOD IN FOR DIFFERENT CHARACTERS,
SO HERE ARE THEIR REACTION SHOTS!!

LANE 17 NAME MAKINA HDCP 0 *は1投目の倒ピン・は2投目の倒ピン**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 SUB/1
X	1 6	6 /	8 1	G 7	9 /	⊖	B	6 /	6 2	114
16	22	40	49	56	74	82	90	105	114	114

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 SUB/1
6 –	9	X	6 /	6 –	⊖ 1	4 –	G 7	X	X 1 7	116
6	15	35	61	67	86	70	77	98	116	230

* INDICATES PINS REMAINING AFTER FIRST THROW
** INDICATES PINS REMAINING AFTER SECOND THROW

LANE 18 NAME HAZAMA HDCP 0 *は1投目の倒ピン・は2投目の倒ピン**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 SUB/1
7 –	X	7 –	9 /	X	9 /	3 5	5 /	7 –	7 1	124
7	24	31	51	71	84	92	109	118	124	124

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 SUB/1
3 1	⊖ –	9 /	8 –	1 7	1 6	3 4	4 /	8 /	7 2	105
4	11	30	39	47	54	61	79	96	105	229

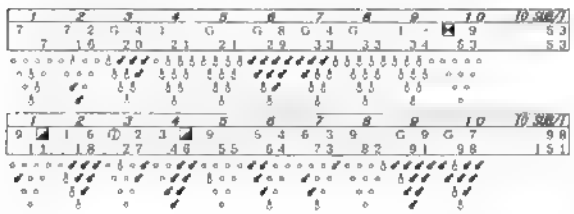
LANE 18 NAME AKASHA HDCP 0 *は1投目の倒ピン・は2投目の倒ピン**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 SUB/1
G 9	G –	8 –	1 1	8 –	8 –	G 9	⊖ –	3 1	9 –	63
9	9	17	19	27	35	44	50	54	63	63

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 SUB/1
7 –	1 6	3 6	6 –	9 /	1 –	8	G /	X	6 –	91
7	14	23	29	40	41	49	69	85	91	154

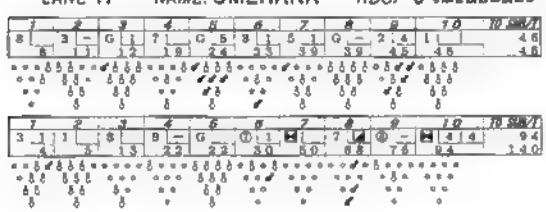
DEATH 35:
DAI-SOUJOU OF THE KOUGON SECT

LANE 18 NAME: AEGIS HDCP: 0

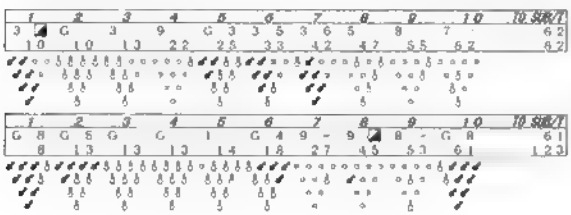


* INDICATES PINS REMAINING AFTER FIRST THROW
** INDICATES PINS REMAINING AFTER SECOND THROW

LANE 17 NAME: UMEHARA HDCP: 0



LANE 17 NAME: OURI HDCP: 0

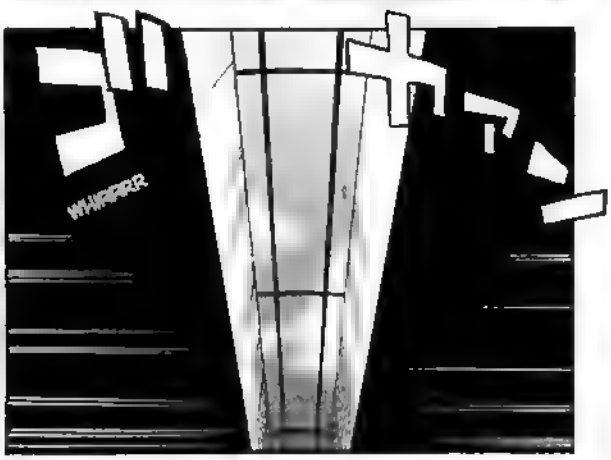


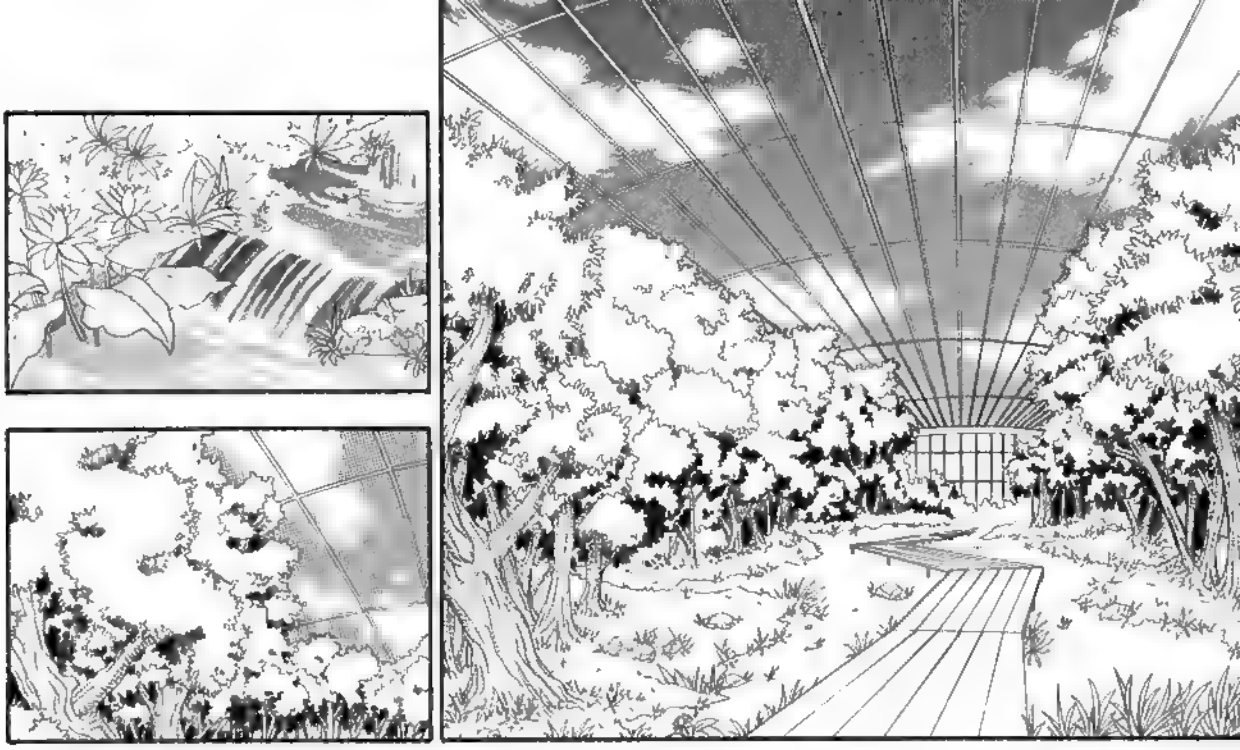
LANE 18 NAME: LI HONG HDCP: 0

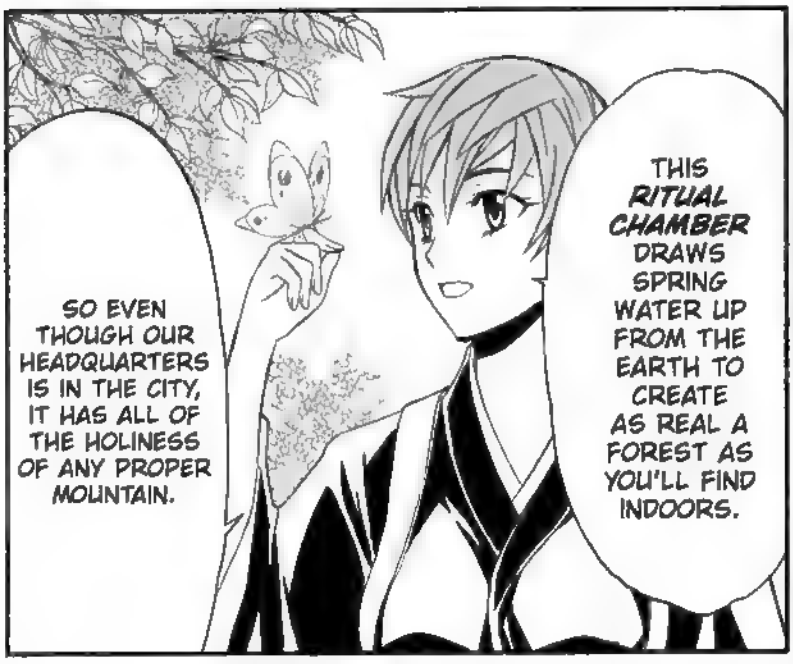
THANKS EVERYONE!

CREAK

!


WHOOSH




SO EVEN THOUGH OUR HEADQUARTERS IS IN THE CITY, IT HAS ALL OF THE HOLINESS OF ANY PROPER MOUNTAIN.
THIS *RITUAL CHAMBER* DRAWS SPRING WATER UP FROM THE EARTH TO CREATE AS REAL A FOREST AS YOU'LL FIND INDOORS.

TWITTER
WOW .....!
IT'S LIKE A REAL FOREST IN HERE .....!!
YES.

IN OTHER WORDS .....
BY DISTRIBUTING THAT SPRING WATER THROUGHOUT THE CITY, YAMA'S PULSE LINES REMAIN PURE AND UNSULLIED.

..... FURTHER-MORE...
STEP 111

IT'S THANKS TO THOSE SPRINGS THAT ALL OF YAMA CITY— INCLUDING THESE HEADQUARTERS— ARE PROTECTED BY A PULSE LINE BARRIER.
YOU COULD SAY THAT THIS IS THE VERY CENTER OF THE KOUGON SECT'S HOLY GROUNDS.
WELCOME.
WELL MET, OURI KAGAMI, MY NEW CONTRACTING MONK.

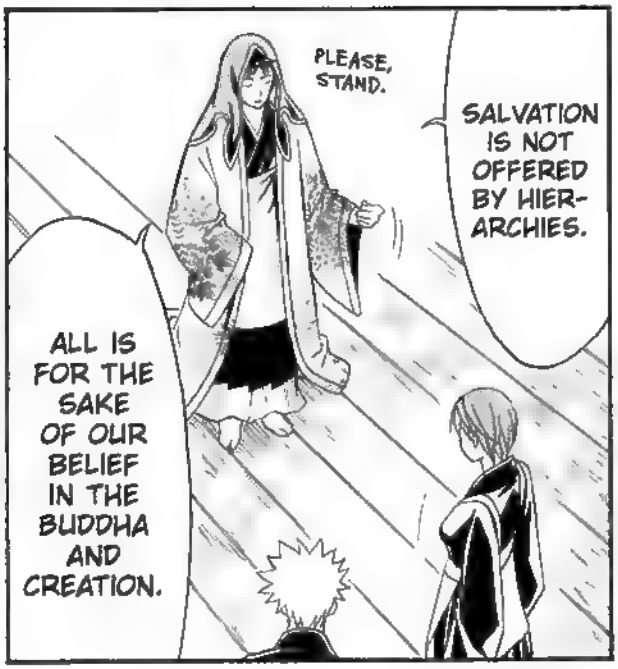
THANK YOU FOR RECEIVING US.
DAI-SOUJOU-SAMA.
AH...
EH?
スッ
SIT
...SOUJOU?
STAGGER
.....DAI—
OH...
ちじ...
SINKING IN
ちじちじ
THIS MAN PRESIDES OVER THE SIX MILLION FAITHFUL OF THE KOUGON SECT.
EH? NO WAY.
"DAI"... THAT MEANS ...
YES.

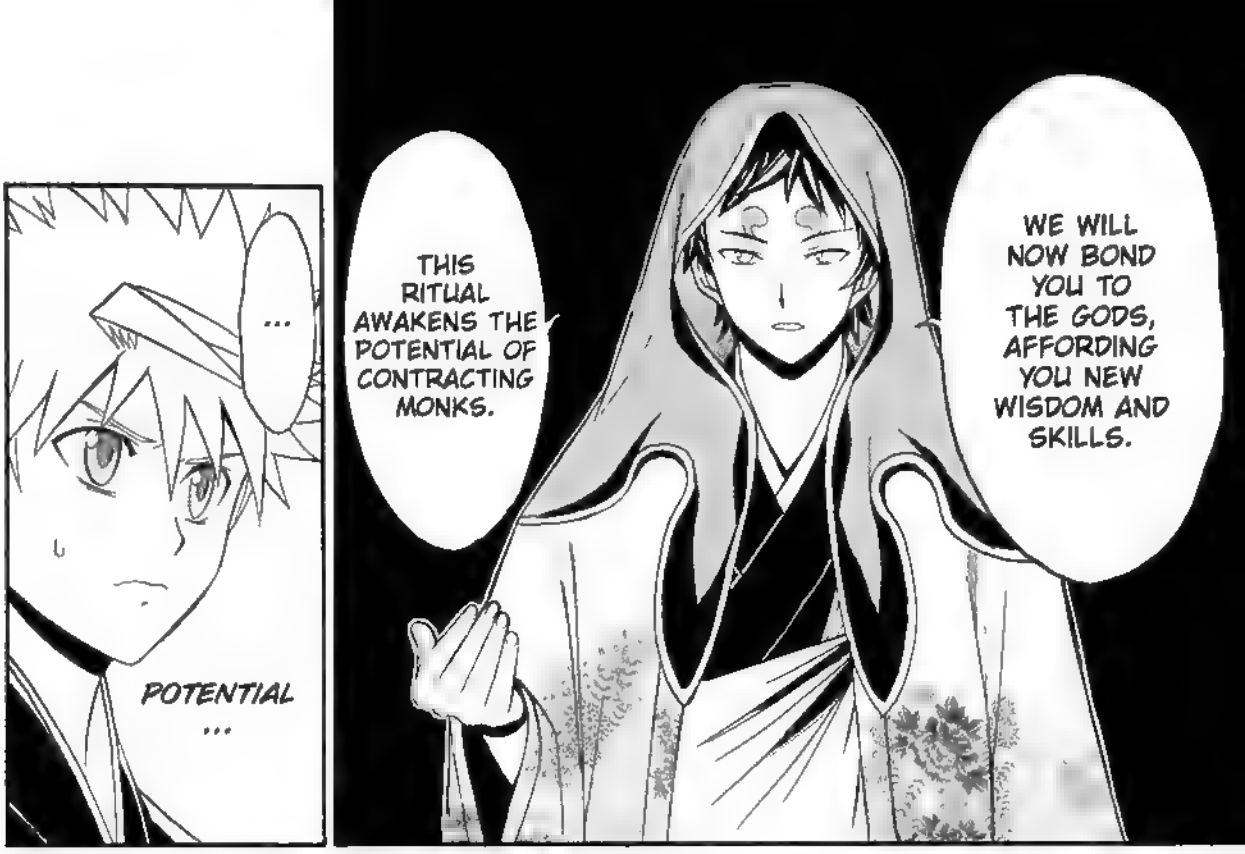
SHINZE "HENJOU GONGEN" KAMIU-SAMA.

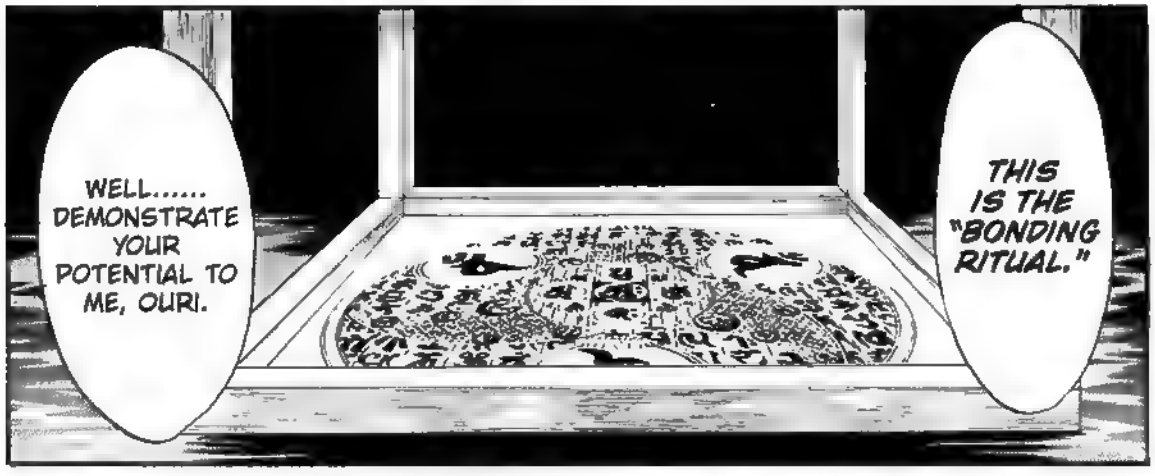
NO NEED TO BE QUITE SO FORMAL.
..... GON-SOUJOU ARAGAMI.

カチ
コチ
STIFF
UMM .....
HELLO.
AH .....
SO YOUNG !!

NOW..... SHALL WE BEGIN, OURI KAGAMI?
YES.


PLEASE, STAND.
SALVATION IS NOT OFFERED BY HIER-ARCHIES.
ALL IS FOR THE SAKE OF OUR BELIEF IN THE BUDDHA AND CREATION.


...
POTENTIAL
...
THIS RITUAL AWAKENS THE POTENTIAL OF CONTRACTING MONKS.
WE WILL NOW BOND YOU TO THE GODS, AFFORDING YOU NEW WISDOM AND SKILLS.

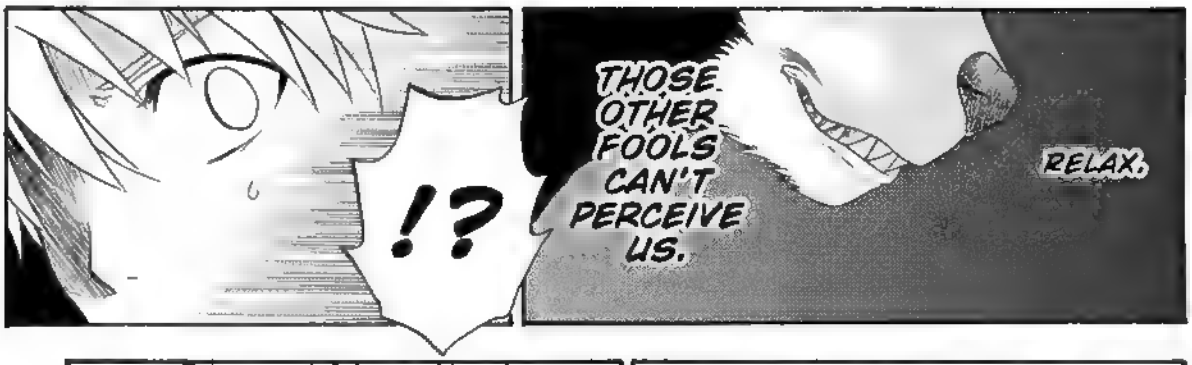

WELL..... DEMONSTRATE YOUR POTENTIAL TO ME, OURI.
THIS IS THE "BONDING RITUAL."

.....WAY SIMPLER THAN I THOUGHT.
WHERE THE LEAF LANDS WILL DETERMINE YOUR BONDING DEITY, OURI-KUN.
..... SEE THAT MANDALA DOWN BELOW? YOU'RE GOING TO CLOSE YOUR EYES AND THROW AN ANISE LEAF DOWN ONTO IT .....

HOWEVER!
IF THE LEAF FALLS OUTSIDE THE BORDER OF THE MANDALA..... YOUR CONNECTION TO THE GODS WILL BE DEEMED TOO WEAK. YOU'LL LOSE YOUR STATUS AS A CONTRACTING MONK. SO PLEASE TAKE CAUTION.
!
CLENCH
HUM
WOOH
TOUKA.

HEHEH..... NOT TOO HARD, NOW, "OMINOUS DEATH OMEN."
WHOOSH
!?
TOSS IT, OURI-KUN!
EH?
ALREADY?
AH. SURE.
ACK!!
DAMMIT!! I PUT TOO MUCH OOMPH INTO IT.
.....WAIT. WHAT WAS THAT...?
CREEP
SLINK
!!
CREEP
CREEP
MEOW.

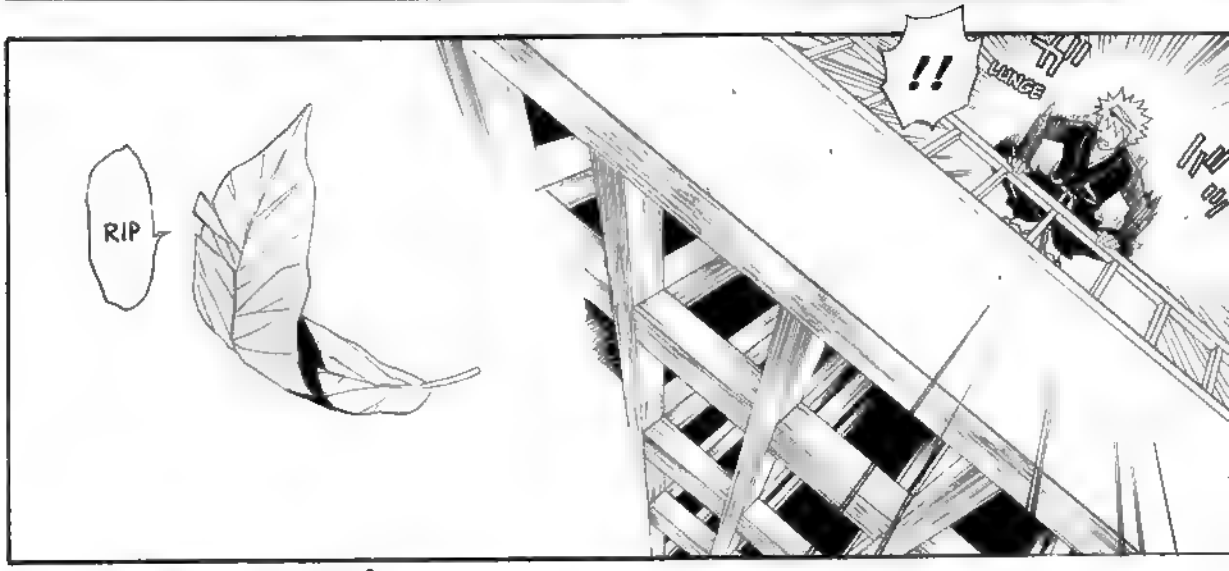
WHY NOW .....?
WAIT..... NEVER MIND THAT...
I THOUGHT YOU WERE KILLED.
YOU... BUT HOW .....?


!?
THOSE OTHER FOOLS CAN'T PERCEIVE US.
RELAX.

?
JUST THINK OF YOUR PRESENCE HERE AS A HALLUCINATION INSIDE YOUR HEAD, OMINOUS DEATH OMEN.
DON'T WORRY.
!?
WHA —?

BUT..... DON'T GET DISTRACTED NOW. THE LEAF IS FALLING.
ALWAYS..... WE WILL ALWAYS BE AT YOUR SIDE— UNTIL YOU EXPIRE.

JUST... WHAT ARE YOU .....?
? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT .....?

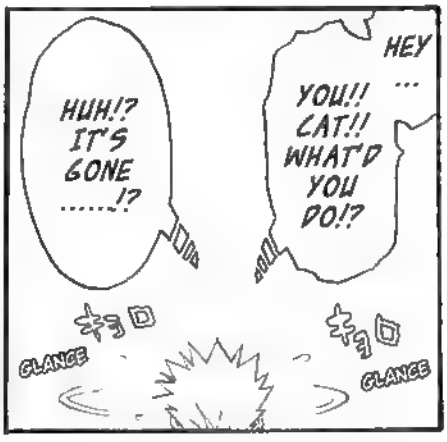

RIP
!!
LUNGE

BURST
SCATTER
SCATTER

CRACKLE
CRACKLE
CRACK
CRACKLE
!?
OH

IT...
...BURST...
...INTO PIECES!!

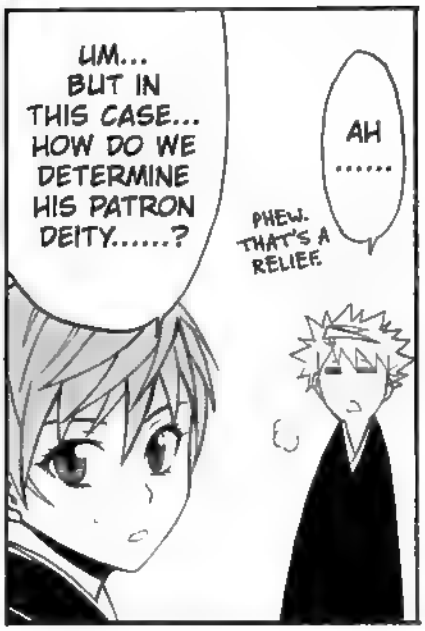
UH..... WELL .....
WHAT HAPPENS NOW...?
RIKA-SAN... MY LEAF EXPLODED AS IT WAS FALLING .....
..... UM.

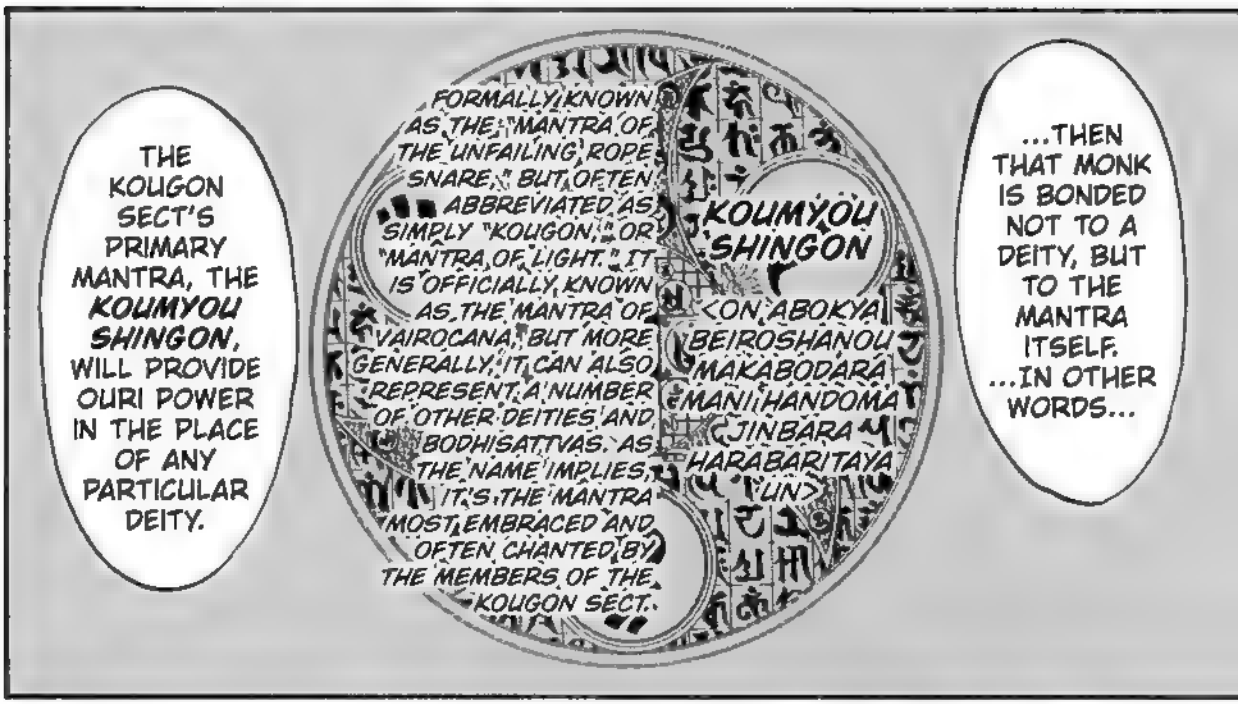

HUH!? IT'S GONE .....!?
HEY... YOU!! CAT!! WHAT'D YOU DO!?
GLANCE
GLANCE

THIS DOES NOT INDICATE THAT YOUR SINS HAVE PREVENTED THE GODS FROM ACCEPTING YOU.
ONE, TWO, THREE...
THOUGH IT DID DISINTEGRATE, EVERY PIECE LANDED WITHIN THE MANDALA.

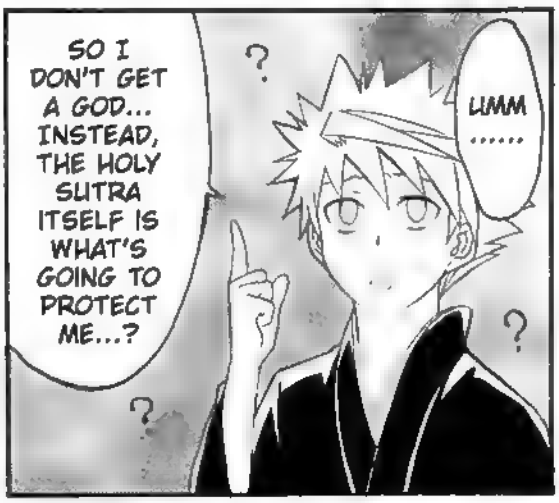
NOT A PROBLEM.
!

IN THE EVENT THAT A SINLESS CONTRACTING MONK CANNOT FORM A BOND WITH A DEITY, FOR WHATEVER REASON...
IN ALL THINGS, THERE ARE SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS.


UM... BUT IN THIS CASE... HOW DO WE DETERMINE HIS PATRON DEITY.....?
AH .....
PHEW. THAT'S A RELIEF.


THE KOUGON SECT'S PRIMARY MANTRA, THE KOUMYOU SHINGON, WILL PROVIDE OURI POWER IN THE PLACE OF ANY PARTICULAR DEITY.
FORMALLY KNOWN AS THE "MANTRA OF THE UNFAILING ROPE SNARE," BUT OFTEN ABBREVIATED AS SIMPLY "KOUGON," OR "MANTRA OF LIGHT." IT IS OFFICIALLY KNOWN AS THE MANTRA OF VAIROCANA, BUT MORE GENERALLY, IT CAN ALSO REPRESENT A NUMBER OF OTHER DEITIES AND BODHISATTVAS. AS THE NAME IMPLIES, IT'S THE MANTRA MOST EMBRACED AND OFTEN CHANTED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE KOUGON SECT.
KOUMYOU SHINGON
ON ABOKYA BEIROSHANOU MAKABODARA MANI HANDOMA JINBARA HARABARITAYA UN
...THEN THAT MONK IS BONDED NOT TO A DEITY, BUT TO THE MANTRA ITSELF. ...IN OTHER WORDS...

SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE, EXACTLY?
YES.


SO I DON'T GET A GOD... INSTEAD, THE HOLY SUTRA ITSELF IS WHAT'S GOING TO PROTECT ME...?
UMM .....

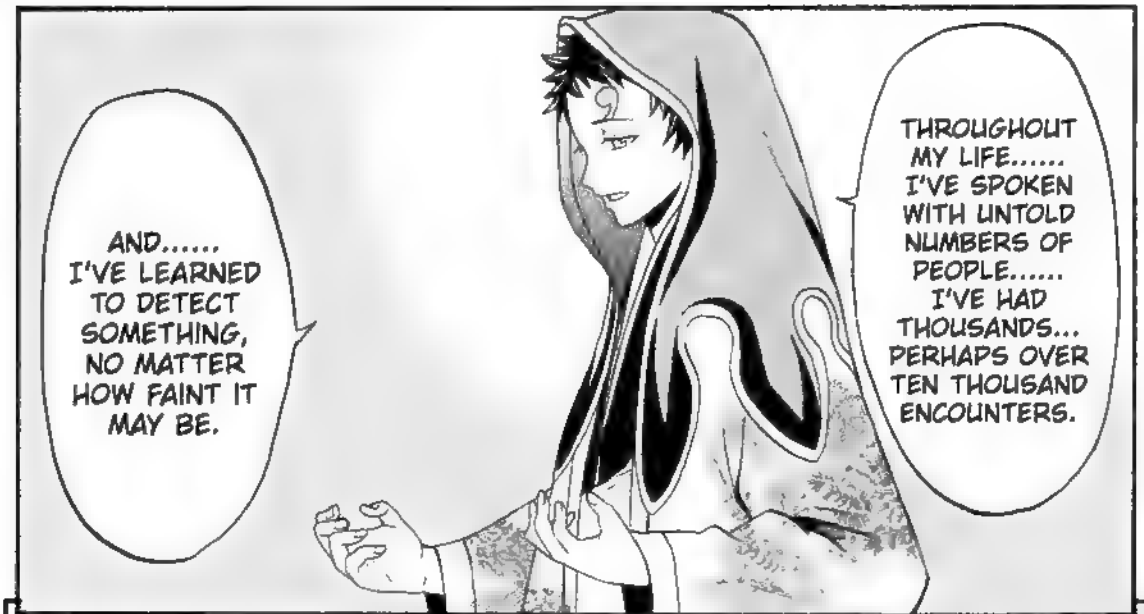
CONTRACTING MONKS WITHOUT PATRONS ARE BETTER OFF NOT TRYING TO *FORCE* A CONNECTION WITH A DEITY, AS THE MANTRA ALONE PROVIDES A FINE BOND. THAT IS THE KOUGON SECT'S RULE OF THUMB.
WELL..... IT ALL DEPENDS ON AFFINITY.
?
AFFINITY .....?
YES..... AFFINITY PLAYS A ROLE IN OUR HOLY BONDS.
IT'S A MATTER OF BALANCE INVOLVING A MONK'S QUALITIES AND THE DIVINE PROTECTION HE OR SHE SEEKS.
BONDING WITH DIFFERENT DEITIES YIELDS DIFFERENT "DIVINE PROTECTION" AND "RITUAL TOOLS."
THIS DETERMINES WHAT YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH AND WHAT YOU CAN USE.
THE ANSWERS DEPEND ON YOUR PARTICULAR DEITY..... SO SOME CONTRACTING MONKS END UP AT A SLOWER PACE.

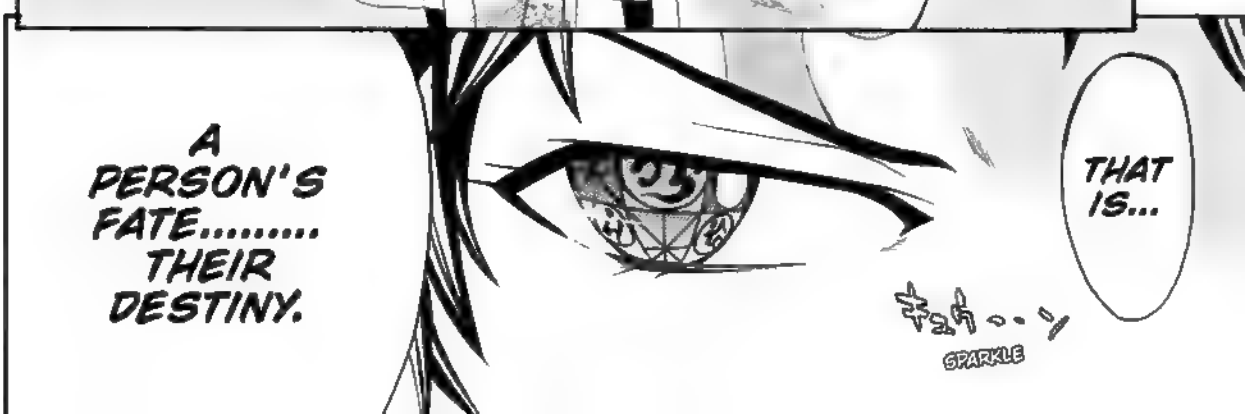
PIERCE
DAI-SOUJOU-SAMA .....
HOW CAN YOU LAUGH ABOUT IT...
INSULT TO INJURY
NOTHING
WELL...YOUR POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE IS EXPANDED ALL THE MORE. THINK OF IT THAT WAY.
HA HA.
HA HA HA.

I'M SORRY TO SAY...
NOTHING
PIERCE
UMM... IN THE CASE OF KOUMYOU SHINGON..... YOU GET NOTHING TO START WITH.
EH !?
HMM...

WHY IS THAT ?
WOBBLE
EH ...?
WOBBLE

HEHEH...
I WASN'T MOCKING. I'M SIMPLY EXCITED.
NO..... I APOL-OGIZE, OURI.


AND..... I'VE LEARNED TO DETECT SOMETHING, NO MATTER HOW FAINT IT MAY BE.
THROUGHOUT MY LIFE..... I'VE SPOKEN WITH UNTOLD NUMBERS OF PEOPLE..... I'VE HAD THOUSANDS... PERHAPS OVER TEN THOUSAND ENCOUNTERS.


A PERSON'S FATE..... THEIR DESTINY.
THAT IS...
SPARKLE

SOME HAVE WHAT I CALL "MIRACULOUS FATES."
THEIRS HAVE UNLIMITED POTENTIAL, LIKE A YET UNEARTHED MINERAL .....
OTHERS CANNOT INFLUENCE THEIR DESTINIES. ONLY A ROLL OF THE GODS' DIE CAN.

.....HIS AGE?

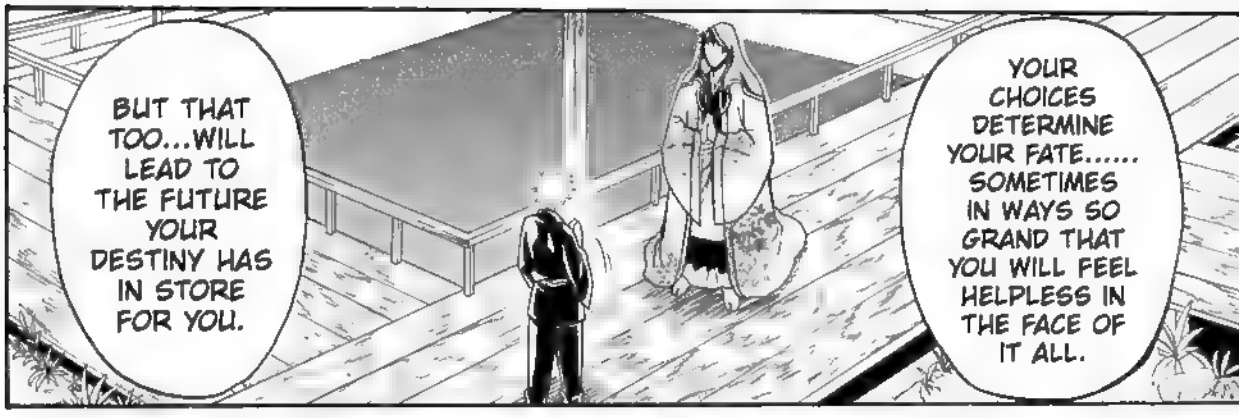
I THANK THE GODS FOR THESE ENCOUNTERS .....
HMPH.
IT MAY BE MY AGE TALKING, BUT ...
WHEN I MEET A YOUNG PERSON WITH A "MIRACULOUS FATE," MY HEART DANCES AS IT WOULD UPON TURNING THE FIRST PAGE OF A NEW AND EXCITING BOOK.

UM ...
EXCUSE ME..... DAI-SOUJOU-SAMA..... HOW OLD ARE YOU?
I AM 43.
GUH !!
YOU SURE DON'T LOOK IT!!

THE MIRACULOUS FATE WITHIN YOU, OURI...
...IS A FOOTHOLD ON THE PATH TO UNCON-STRAINED POTENTIAL.
YOU HAVE BONDED NOT WITH A DEITY BUT WITH THE MANTRA..... ITS WORDS CANNOT BE TIED DOWN. THAT IS YOUR TRUTH.

I FEEL LIKE..... THAT'S ALL I CAN DO.....
I'LL DO..... THE BEST I CAN.
RIGHT.
OURI.
THUS DOES YOUR MIRACULOUS FATE MANIFEST.

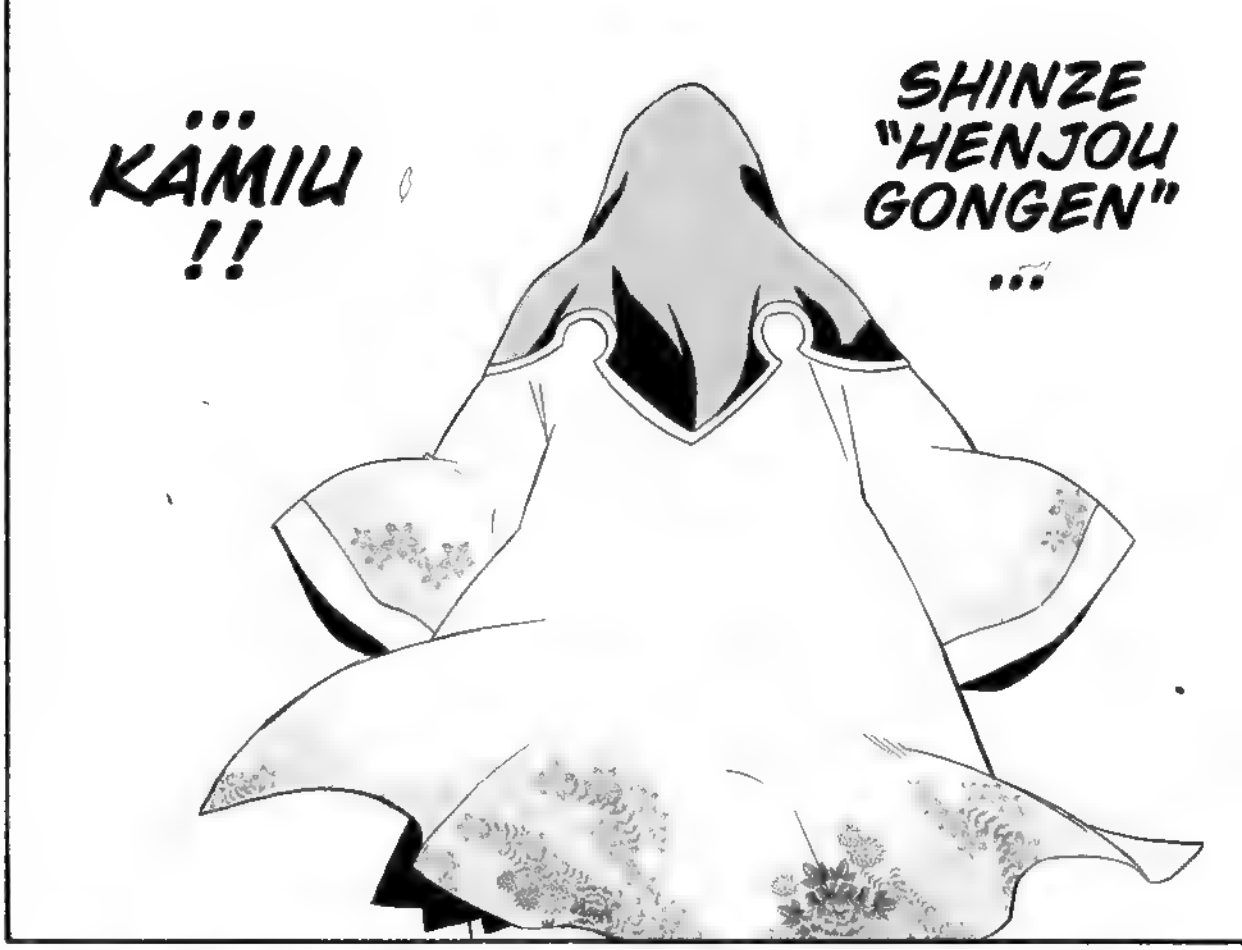
AS I IMPLIED BEFORE..... THE FORM YOUR MIRACULOUS FATE TAKES DEPENDS ON YOUR ACTIONS.
..... OURI.
MAKE THE NECESSARY PREPARATIONS TO BOND OURI TO THE KOUMYOU SHINGON.
YES.
GON-SOUJOU ARAGAMI.
YES?


BUT THAT TOO...WILL LEAD TO THE FUTURE YOUR DESTINY HAS IN STORE FOR YOU.
YOUR CHOICES DETERMINE YOUR FATE..... SOMETIMES IN WAYS SO GRAND THAT YOU WILL FEEL HELPLESS IN THE FACE OF IT ALL.

ESPECIALLY..... COUNSEL GIVEN BY ENTITIES WHICH ONLY YOU CAN PERCEIVE.
ABOVE ALL ELSE... DO NOT GIVE YOURSELF TO THAT WHICH WOULD CONTAMINATE YOUR MIRACULOUS FATE.

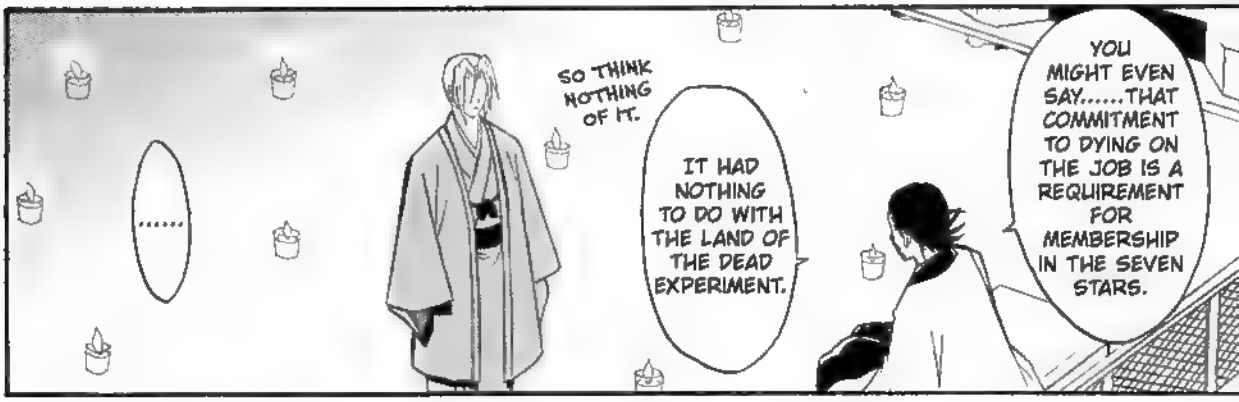
COULD HE SEE IT!?
THE CAT, BEFORE.
!
WAIT, CAN HE ...!?
?
TALKING ABOUT MY UNKNOWABLE FATE..... AND STARING WITH THOSE ALL-KNOWING EYES.....
THIS IS WHY HE'S AT THE TOP..... WHY HE HAS SIX MILLION FOLLOWERS... HE'S...
YET..... IF HE NOTICED THE CAT, DOES THAT MEAN HE KNOWS WHAT IT IS?
RIKA-SAN DEFINITELY DIDN'T..... AND THE CAT SAID IT WAS MY OWN HALLUCINATION .....!

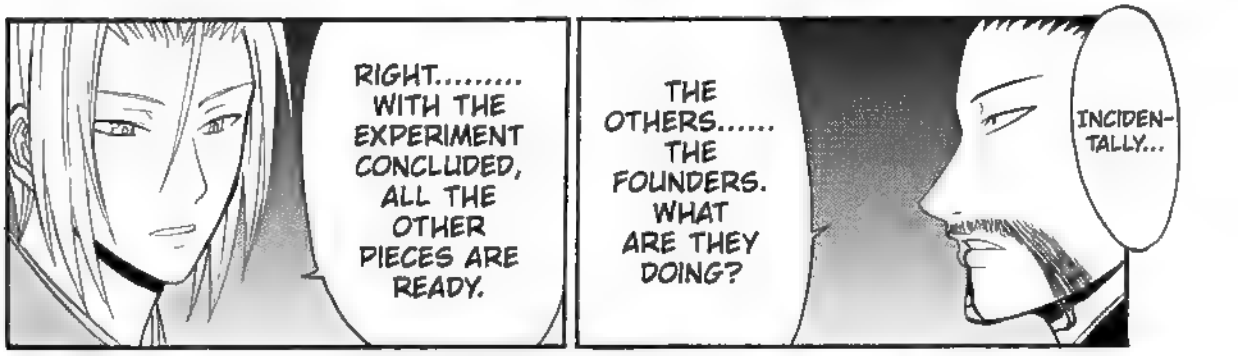
THE KOUGON SECT'S DAI-SOUJOU. A TRUE "SAINT"!!


SHINZE "HENJOU GONGEN" ...
... KAMIU !!

.....I'M AFRAID... I MUST APOLOGIZE FOR WHAT HAPPENED .....
HOW UNUSUALLY *SWEET* OF YOU.
HEH-HEH.
THE BUSINESS WITH ENA?
HEH HEH..... FOR WHAT, AKASHA?

SIZZLE
SIZZLE
UNFOR-TUNATELY, THAT'S NOT IT.
ENA LIVED AND DIED BY HIS OWN "SAGA."
AND THAT IS HOW IT SHOULD BE.
WHAT AN AMUSING SENTIMENT... HEH-HEH-HEH.
IS IT BECAUSE YOU THINK WE ACTED ON YOUR REQUEST ...?


.....
SO THINK NOTHING OF IT.
IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE LAND OF THE DEAD EXPERIMENT.
YOU MIGHT EVEN SAY.....THAT COMMITMENT TO DYING ON THE JOB IS A REQUIREMENT FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE SEVEN STARS.

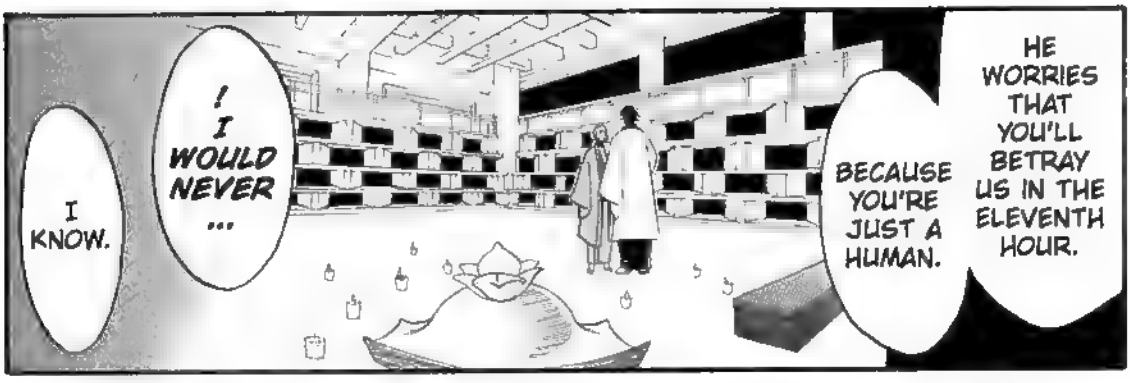

RIGHT..... WITH THE EXPERIMENT CONCLUDED, ALL THE OTHER PIECES ARE READY.
THE OTHERS..... THE FOUNDERS. WHAT ARE THEY DOING?
INCIDEN-TALLY...

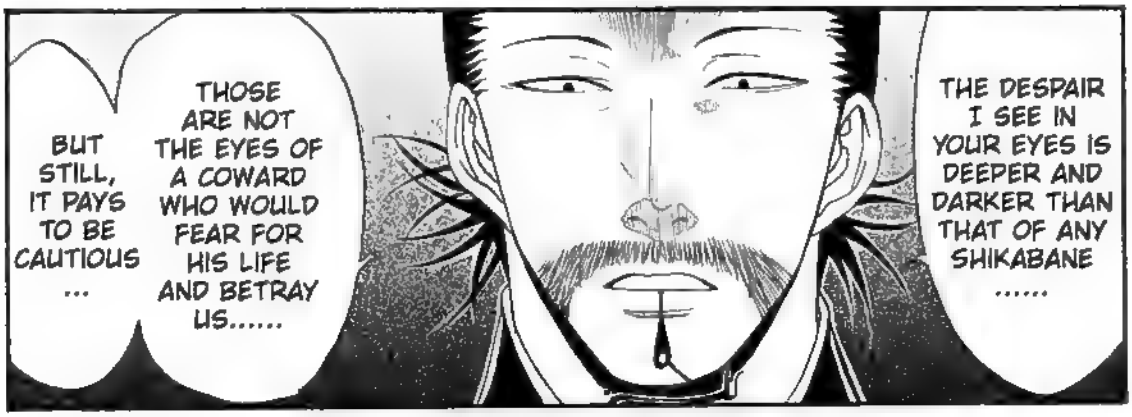
THE FOUNDERS SIMPLY HAVE TO FIT THEM INTO PLACE.
NOW...

HEH HEH ...
ALL ACCORDING TO YOUR PLAN, RIGHT AKASHA?
ABSO-LUTELY.
HMPH..... SO YOU'RE PREPARED FOR WHAT COMES AFTER.....I ASSUME?
I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN HIDING FROM THE KING AND SNEAKING OUT ON YOUR OWN.
DON'T PLAY DUMB.
STAND
WHAT-EVER DO YOU MEAN?
.....
RIGHT, TRAITOR MONK?
YANK
IT'S TIME YOU CAME CLEAN... ABOUT YOUR TRUE MOTIVES.
TUG
GETTING YOUR REVENGE ON THE KOUGON SECT IS ONLY PART OF THE REASON YOU JOINED THE UNCLEAN BUNCH, NO?

.....
WITH THE INVASION CLOSE AT HAND ...
...KEITO CAME TO ME WITH A REQUEST.

...!


I KNOW.
! I WOULD NEVER ...
BECAUSE YOU'RE JUST A HUMAN.
HE WORRIES THAT YOU'LL BETRAY US IN THE ELEVENTH HOUR.


BUT STILL, IT PAYS TO BE CAUTIOUS ...
THOSE ARE NOT THE EYES OF A COWARD WHO WOULD FEAR FOR HIS LIFE AND BETRAY US.....
THE DESPAIR I SEE IN YOUR EYES IS DEEPER AND DARKER THAN THAT OF ANY SHIKABANE .....

.....

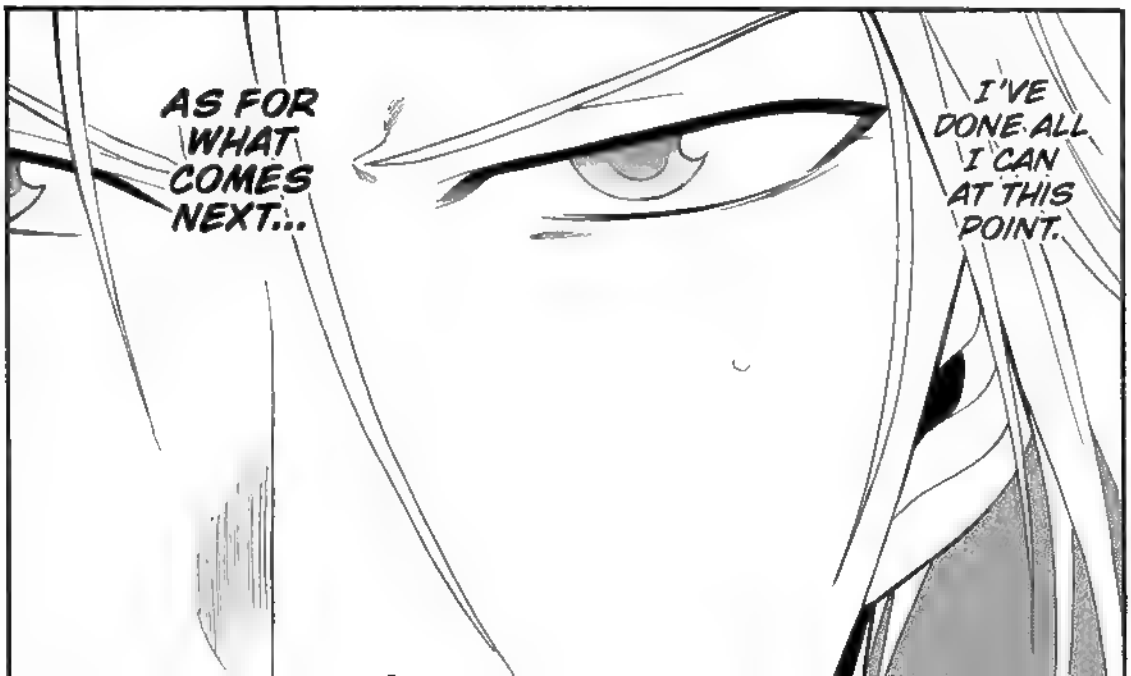
APPEAR
OR..... WOULD YOU PREFER ONE OF ISAKA'S LOCALES ?
SO..... YOU'LL ONLY BE IMPRISONED FOR A SHORT WHILE.

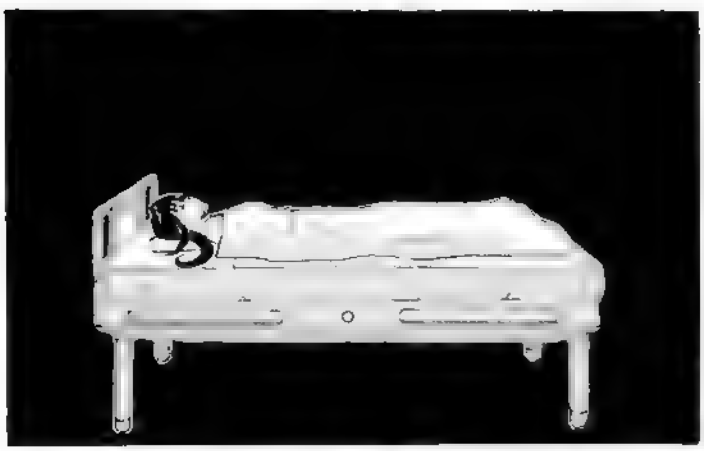
COUGH
ゲホ・・
AT LEAST AGREE TO BRING ME NEWS FROM THE OUTSIDE.
..... HOW-EVER ...

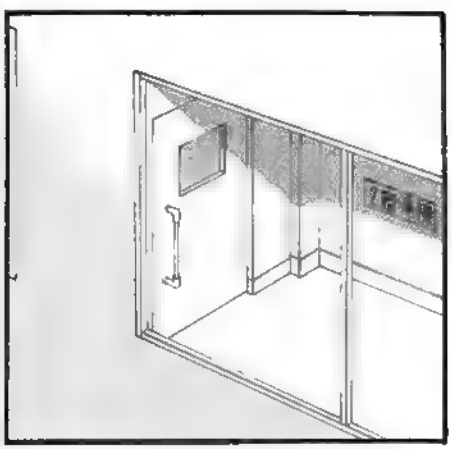
SLAP
UNDER-STOOD..... MAY I STAY IN THE STORAGE ROOM BELOW?
THAT WILL DO.

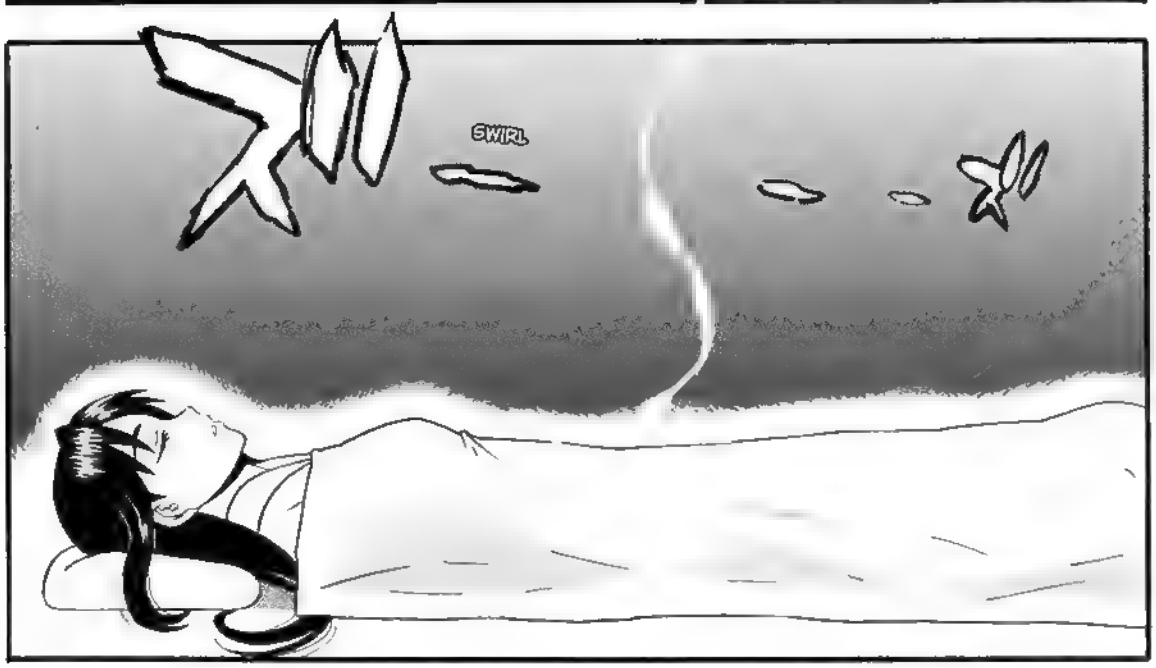
VERY WELL.
THIS ISN'T OUR WAY OF DOING THINGS IN THE FIRST PLACE.

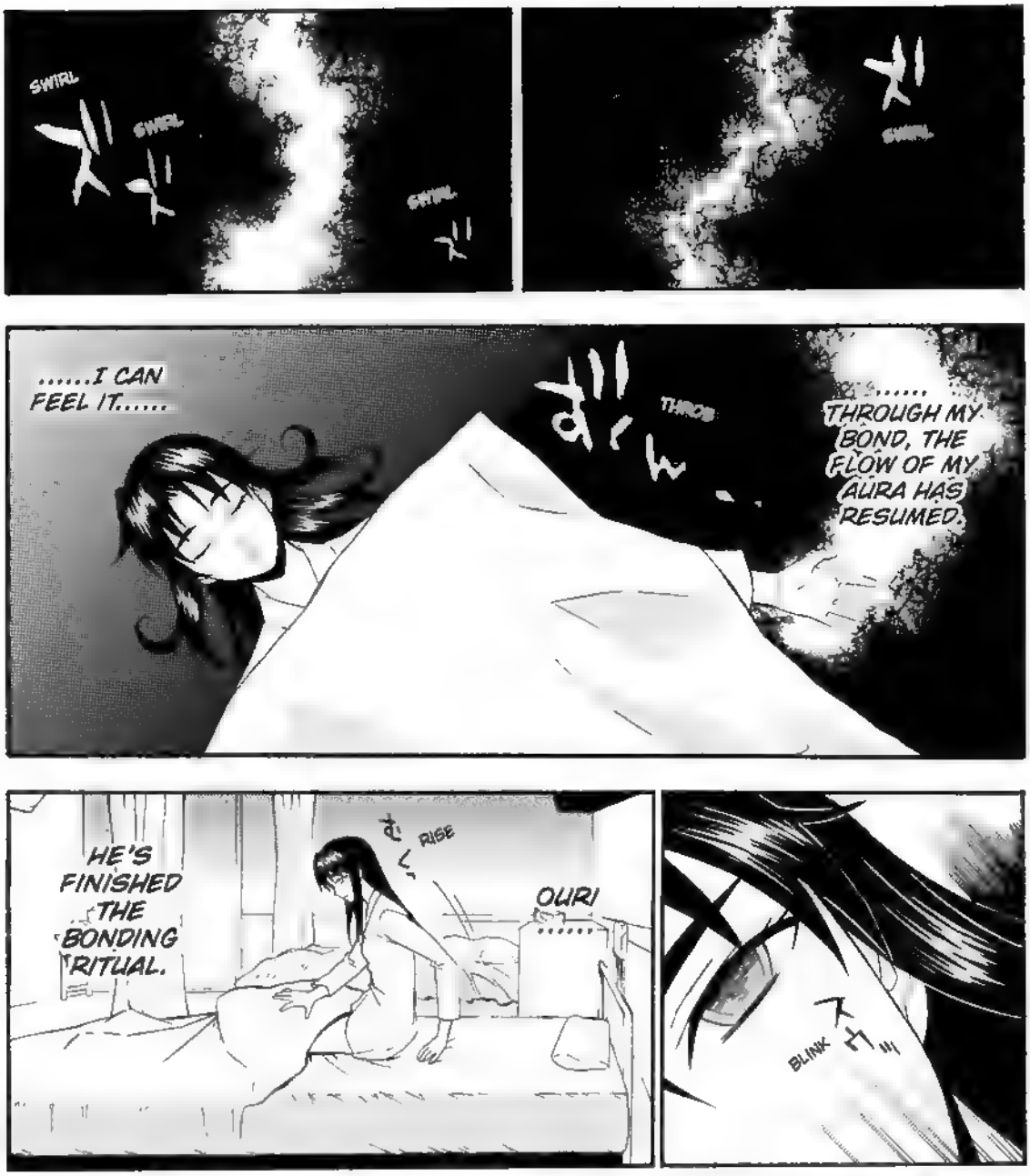
NO MATTER.
.....


AS FOR WHAT COMES NEXT...
I'VE DONE ALL I CAN AT THIS POINT.






SWIRL


SWIRL
SWIRL
SWIRL
SWIRL
.....I CAN FEEL IT.....
THROB
..... THROUGH MY BOND, THE FLOW OF MY AURA HAS RESUMED.
HE'S FINISHED THE BONDING RITUAL.
RISE
OURI .....
BLINK
BOOK: GANGAN
THAT WAS A CLOSE ONE !!
TOO BAD. AFTER I FINISHED READING, I WAS GONNA DRESS YOU UP IN A SEXY COSTUME I NABBED FROM UMEHARA.
!
UP ALREADY, MAKINA?
HUH ?

FLUSH
DRAIN
DRAIN
SHE'S EASILY INFLUENCED, HUH...
I JUST READ A MANGA ABOUT NURSES, SO I COULD TOTALLY HELP YOU USE A BEDPAN!!
BLUNTLY
OH. DID YOU NEED TO PEE!?
UH..... NO THANKS.
TADA
BETTER BE CARE-FUL.
NO SURPRISE I'M STILL A LITTLE WOBBLY ...
WOBBLE
WHOOPS.
.....UP THERE?
SMELLS LIKE FLOWERS.
!

A WHOLE FIELD OF THEM .....
WHO KNEW THEY HAD A PLACE LIKE THIS IN HERE .....
WHO'S THERE ?
CRUNCH
THIS PLACE IS NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.
! AH. SORRY.
I'LL LEAVE ...
!
AH!
STEP

HMM?
YOU'RE..... MAKINA HOSHIMURA, AREN'T YOU?

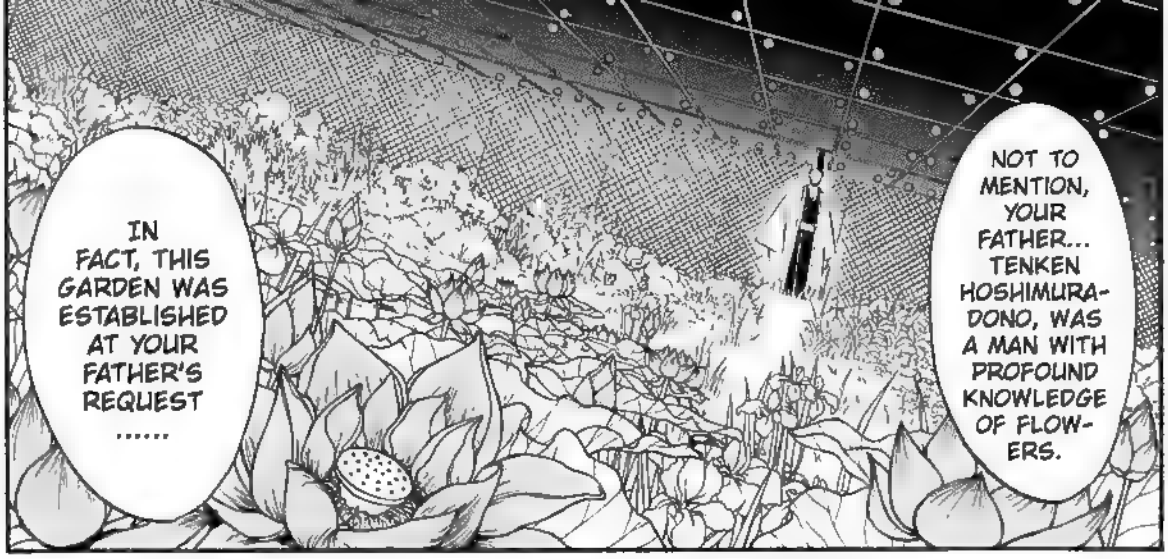
IT'S THE NUMBER-TWO GUY IN THE KOUGON SECT.
TOKIHANA SHIOU.....
—SAMA. WHY ARE YOU HERE ...?

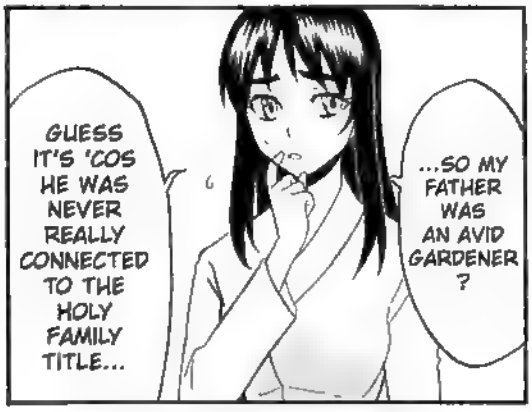
I SEE..... YOU ARE WELCOME HERE.
YES.

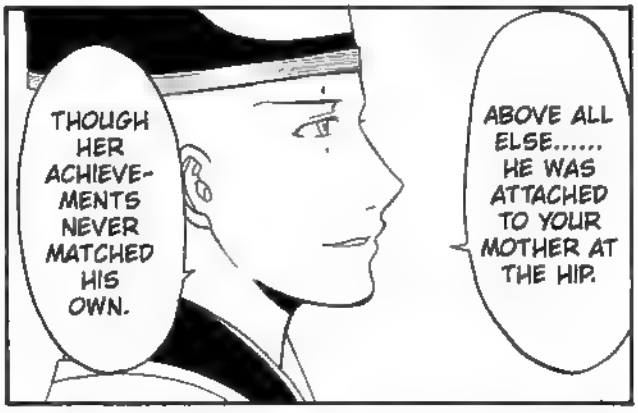
ONLY MEMBERS OF THE TEN GREAT HOLY FAMILIES AND MONKS AT THE SHOU-SOUJOU LEVEL OR HIGHER ARE PERMITTED ENTRY..... BUT...
IN THIS GARDEN, WE SELECTIVELY BREED MEDICINAL PLANTS AND CULTIVATE FLOWERS NOW EXTINCT IN THE WILD.

?

AND THAT IS A GOOD ENOUGH REASON TO ALLOW YOU IN HERE.
THOUGH YOU DIED AND BECAME A CORPSE PRINCESS, THE BLOOD OF A HOLY FAMILY FLOWS THROUGH YOU, JUST LIKE ME .....


IN FACT, THIS GARDEN WAS ESTABLISHED AT YOUR FATHER'S REQUEST .....
NOT TO MENTION, YOUR FATHER... TENKEN HOSHIMURA-DONO, WAS A MAN WITH PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE OF FLOWERS.


GUESS IT'S 'COS HE WAS NEVER REALLY CONNECTED TO THE HOLY FAMILY TITLE...
...SO MY FATHER WAS AN AVID GARDENER ?


THOUGH HER ACHIEVEMENTS NEVER MATCHED HIS OWN.
ABOVE ALL ELSE..... HE WAS ATTACHED TO YOUR MOTHER AT THE HIP.

NO PERSON CAN IGNORE HIS OR HER ORIGIN...OR LINEAGE... ESPECIALLY...
NOT AT ALL, MAKINA HOSHIMURA.
NOT CONNECTED ...?

FOR THOSE FAMILIES CARRY THE BLOOD OF THOSE ORIGINAL TEN DISCIPLES. THE ONES WHO, ALONGSIDE OUR FOUNDER, PROTECTED THIS WORLD FROM THE DEAD AND SPREAD THEIR TEACHING.
THAT TITLE DESIGNATES THE HIGHEST-RANKING INDIVIDUALS IN OUR KOUGON SECT.
THE TEN GREAT HOLY FAMILIES.

AS THE DAUGHTER OF THE HOSHIMURA HOLY FAMILY, YOU WERE RAISED AS THOUGH A PRINCESS.
AND THAT HONOR EXTENDS TO YOU AS WELL.

IT WAS BECAUSE YOUR FATHER AGREED TO CARRY OUT HIS DUTIES AS THE FAMILY'S PATRIARCH .....
SURROUNDED BY SERVANTS, YOU WERE NEVER DENIED ANYTHING.....
AHHH.
apron

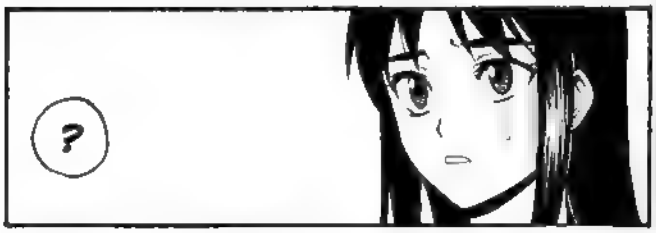
AND YOU, FORCED TO FIGHT BATTLE AFTER BLOODY BATTLE AS A CORPSE PRINCESS... I CANNOT HELP BUT PITY YOU.....
YOUR FAMILY DEAD, YOUR BLOODLINE SEVERED .....
HOWEVER..... IT ALL CAME TO RUIN WHEN THE SEVEN STARS ATTACKED.

PLEASE, WAIT.
BEFORE YOU LEAVE, I MUST ASK THE LAST MEMBER OF THE HOSHIMURA HOLY FAMILY ONE QUESTION.
.....
MAY I...GO NOW?

THE HOLY FAMILIES ALSO PASS DOWN CERTAIN ITEMS.
ALONG WITH THE DUTY AND HONOR THAT COMES WITH THE TITLE.....
.....AND WHAT'S THAT?
ONLY TEN EXIST IN THE WORLD..... THE SCROLLS THAT TELL OF THE RITUAL TO CREATE CORPSE PRINCESSES.
OUR ULTIMATE HIDDEN TECHNIQUES, THE "DEATH MAIDEN SUTRAS."
HOWEVER... THERE WAS NO TRACE OF THE DEATH MAIDEN SUTRA.
THAT NIGHT.
THE NIGHT YOUR HOUSE WAS ATTACKED AND THE HOSHIMURA FAMILY WAS ENDED BY THE SEVEN STARS.....
WE CONDUCTED A THOROUGH SEARCH OF THE PREMISES.
OF COURSE, THAT WAS OUR FIRST THOUGHT.
.....MAYBE IT BURNED UP?

.....
NO.
THAT'S... TOO BAD.

THERE WASN'T A SINGLE FRAGMENT OF THE SUTRA.
YET... WHEN WE EXAMINED EVERY LAST BIT OF ASH FROM THE ROOM IT WAS STORED IN.....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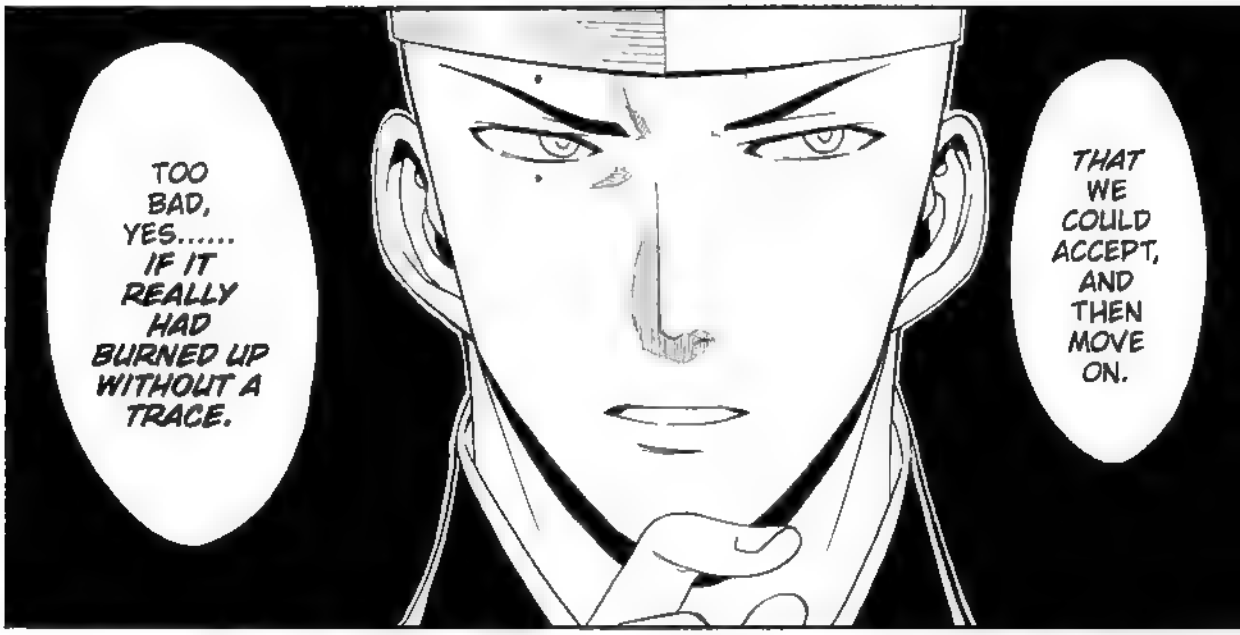
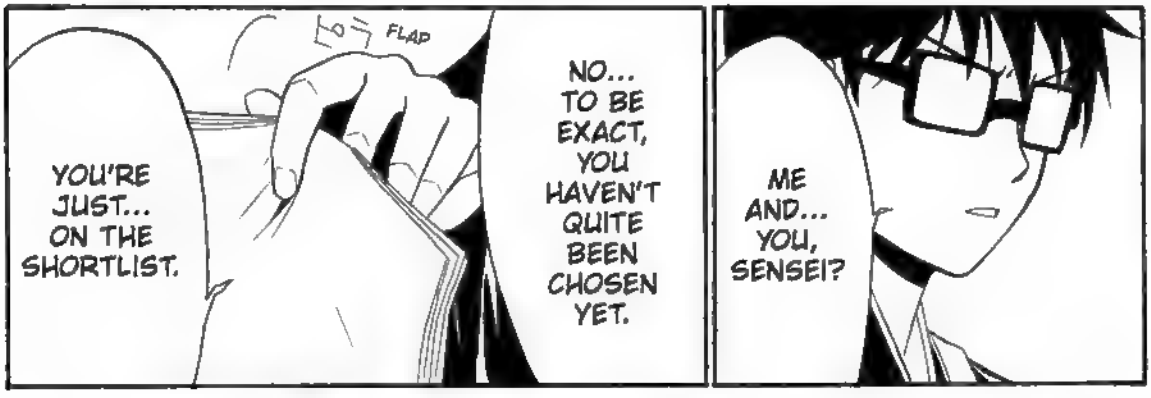

TOO BAD, YES..... IF IT REALLY HAD BURNED UP WITHOUT A TRACE.
THAT WE COULD ACCEPT, AND THEN MOVE ON.

I WANT YOU TO THINK BACK. .....BACK TO THAT TIME.
CRUNCH
...ALBEIT A VERY IMPORTANT ONE.
I HAVE AN ODD QUESTION ...

.....?
HMM?

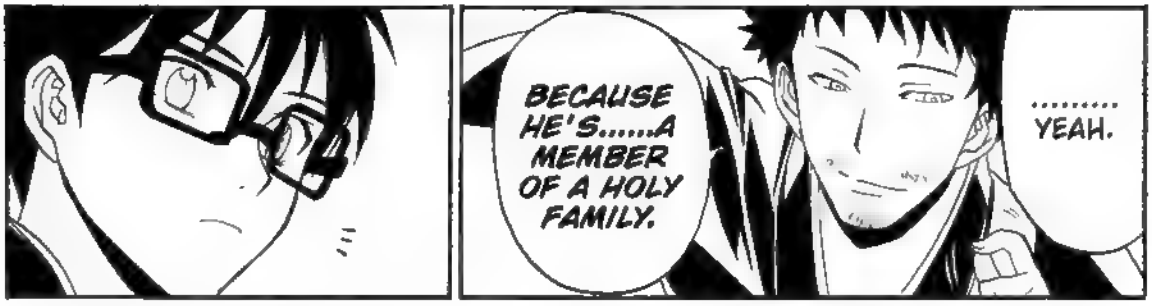
WERE THERE ANY OTHERS WHO BROKE IN BESIDES THE SEVEN STARS?
THAT NIGHT.
.....EH?
PARDON MY POINTLESS QUESTION.
YOU MAY LEAVE.
THAT'S A SHAME.
RIGHT..... I HAD HEARD THAT YOU DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING.
.....
.....
UNTIL NEXT TIME.
MAKINA OF THE FORMER HOLY FAMILY, HOSHIMURA.

ASSAS-
SINATE
THE
KING
.....!


FLAP
YOU'RE
JUST...
ON THE
SHORTLIST.
NO...
TO BE
EXACT,
YOU
HAVEN'T
QUITE
BEEN
CHOSEN
YET.
ME
AND...
YOU,
SENSEI?

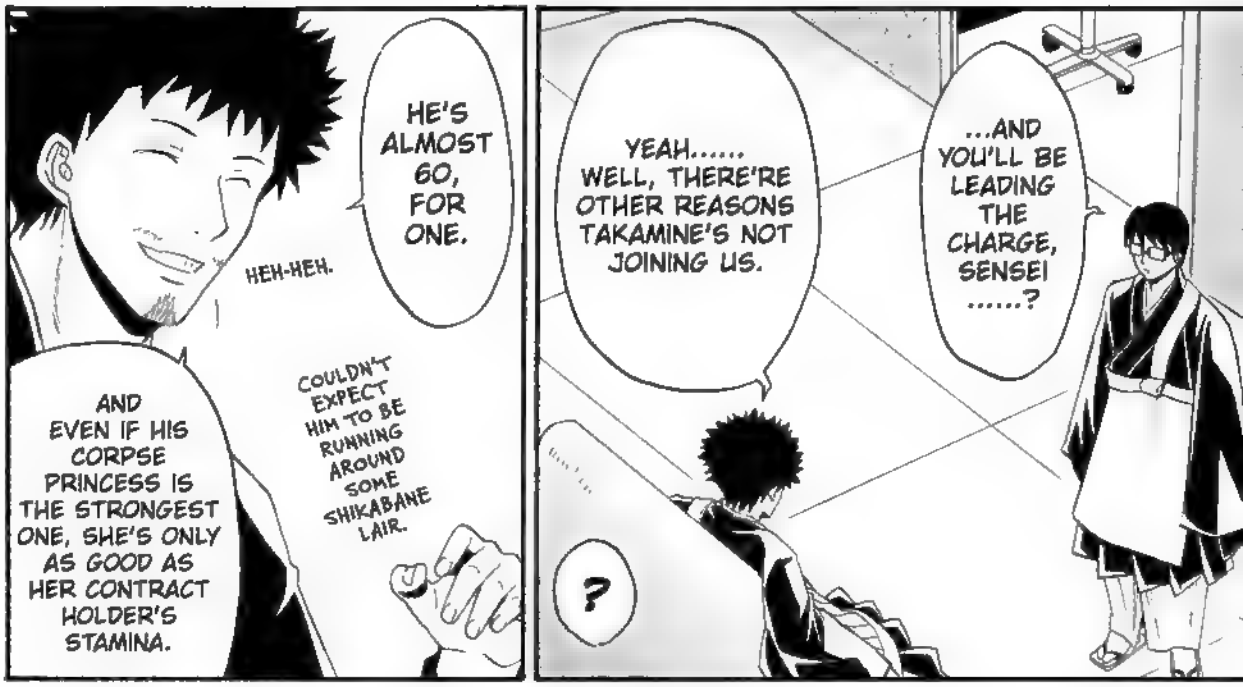
.....!
I HEAR
THEY'RE
GONNA CHOOSE
THE TEAM
MEMBERS AT
THE NEXT
HIGH COUNCIL,
THE "RITE OF
DISCOURSE."
BESIDES
YOU, THERE
ARE A BUNCH
OF OTHER
CANDIDATES
.....

SO IN THE MEANTIME, THAT LIST HAS THE NAMES OF OUR STRONGEST PEOPLE, IN ORDER.
GOTTA SAY, AS YOUR MASTER, I'M PRETTY PROUD.
HA-HA-HA.
.....
BUT IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN IT'S MISSING SEVERAL NAMES I'D EXPECT TO SEE, LIKE TAKAMINE-SAMA.....


BECAUSE HE'S.....A MEMBER OF A HOLY FAMILY.
.....
YEAH.

CONSIDERING ALL THAT'S HAPPENED, THIS SECRET MISSION'S OUR HOPE FOR TURNING THE TABLES.
.....
BUT...

WE'RE ATTEMPTING TO KILL A KING WHOSE LAIR IS GUARDED BY THE STRONGEST SHIKABANE OUT THERE.
SO APPARENTLY..... THEY'RE NOT WILLING TO BET THE LIVES OF ANY HOLY FAMILY MEMBERS ON A MISSION THAT'S SURE TO SEE MORE THAN A FEW CASUALTIES.


HE'S ALMOST 60, FOR ONE.
HEH-HEH.
COULDN'T EXPECT HIM TO BE RUNNING AROUND SOME SHIKABANE LAIR.
AND EVEN IF HIS CORPSE PRINCESS IS THE STRONGEST ONE, SHE'S ONLY AS GOOD AS HER CONTRACT HOLDER'S STAMINA.
YEAH..... WELL, THERE'RE OTHER REASONS TAKAMINE'S NOT JOINING US.
?
...AND YOU'LL BE LEADING THE CHARGE, SENSEI .....?

SO BASICALLY, I JUST HAPPEN TO BE THE BEST MAN FOR THE JOB.
SHINK
PLUS, I'VE GOT THIS ANTI-SHIKABANE "FUDOU MYOU-OU BLADE."

.....
SENSEI.
I JUST WANTED YOU TO KEEP IT IN MIND, OKAY?
SO WE'RE STILL NOT SURE WHO THE TEAM MEMBERS ARE GONNA BE IN THE END, BUT ...

LIKE I SAID, NOTHING'S NAILED DOWN YET.
.....
TAKE ME WITH YOU.
PLEASE.
.....
TAKA-MASA.
IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT YOUR DIRECT DISCIPLE WOULD BE THERE TO GIVE YOU SUPPORT.
BUT .....
.....
SENSEI.
GET IT?
BUT I'M NOT THE ONE WHO GETS TO DECIDE .....
I'M GLAD TO HEAR THAT. I REALLY AM...

I...
...HAVE TO SAVE AS MANY PEOPLE AS I CAN!
.....YEAH, I GOT IT.
I KNOW WHY YOU'RE SO DETER-MINED.
BUT YOU JUST GOTTA HANG IN THERE.

KANE-CHIKA.

I FEEL LIKE..... THIS MISSION'LL KILL HIM.
I THINK YOU SHOULD EXCLUDE TAKAMASA FROM THE TEAM.

HE'S ONE HELL OF A CONTRACTING MONK.
BUT EVEN SO...
YEAH, MAYBE.

..... YES.
PERSONALLY, I JUST WANT TAKAMASA TO BE FREE OF THE CHAINS HOLDING HIM BACK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
AND IN THIS SITUATION, WE DON'T HAVE THE LUXURY OF TAKING PEOPLE'S PERSONAL BAGGAGE INTO ACCOUNT.

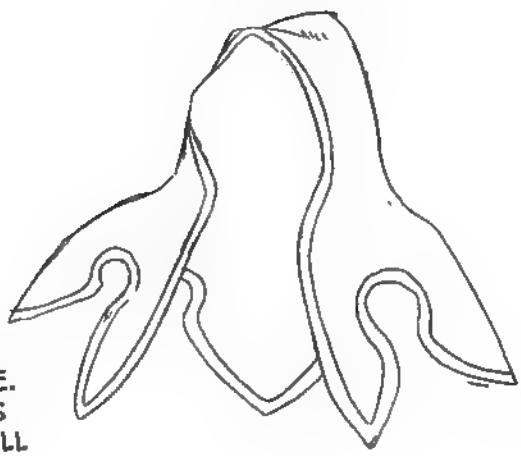
DARK..... WITH THICK CLOUDS AND A BLOOD-RED SUN.
COME TO THINK OF IT..... THERE WAS A SIMILAR SUNSET THAT DAY.

THAT DAY...
.....GUH.
TCH .....

WHOOSH
FLINCH
!!
SHIT
!!
!!
SLAM
.....I'M SORRY.

THE DAI-SOUJOU'S COWL
"DHARANI CROWN"

A-RANK—A RITUAL TOOL THAT RENDERS A SHIKABANE'S SPIRITUAL PRESSURE INEFFECTIVE. AS LONG AS ONE WEARS IT, ONE IS GRANTED PERFECT RECALL FOR ALL THAT IS SEEN OR HEARD.



DEATH 36:
REMINISCENCE (PART 1)

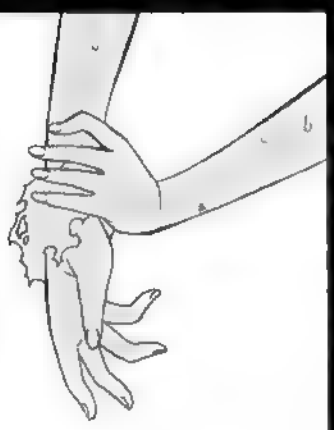
I CAN'T HEAR THE GROANS OF RESENTMENT.

BUT THIS VAST, EXPANDING SEA OF BLOOD...

...IS DEFINITELY...MY PUNISHMENT.

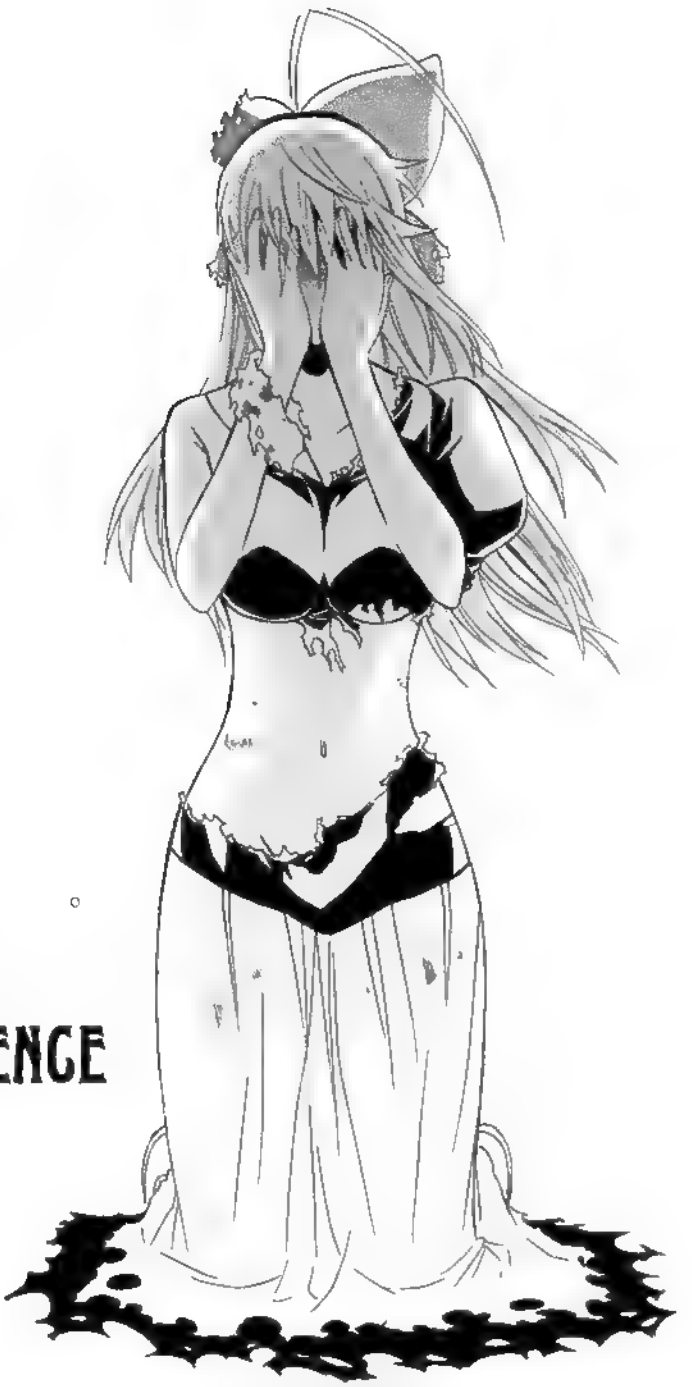
I..... FORCED TAKAMASA TO THROW AWAY SOMETHING DEAR TO HIM.....

SO I CAN'T REACH OUT TO HIM WITH THIS HAND ...



THAT IS MY PUNISHMENT .....

...AND I BROUGHT IT UPON MYSELF.

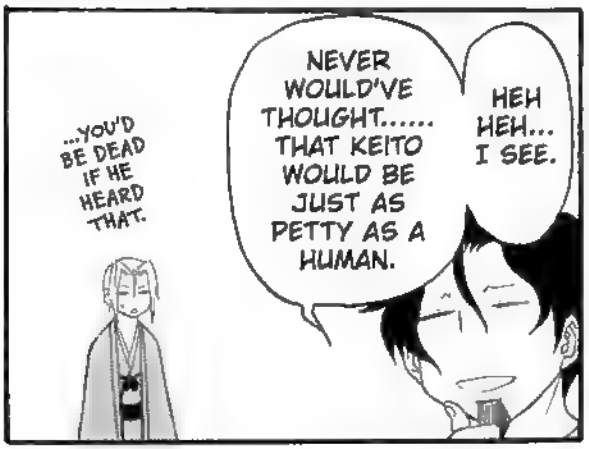


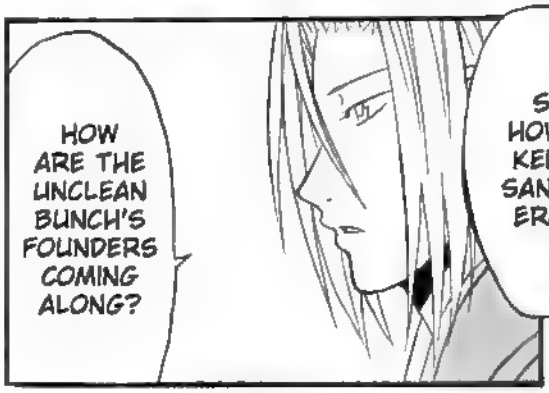
DEATH 36: REMINISCENCE (PART 1)

SKRITCH
SKRITCH
KNOCK
KNOCK
!
.....
ODDLY ENOUGH, YOU SEEM RATHER COMFORT-ABLE HERE, AKASHA.
SOME FOOD. ALSO, WHAT YOU ASKED FOR.
CLUNK
YES..... WELL, AS THEY SAY, "HOME IS WHERE YOU MAKE IT."
HAH.
IS THAT SUPPOSED TO BE FUNNY?

HEY.
THEY MUST ACTUALLY TRUST YOU.
THANK YOU.
...
IT SEEMED PRETTY LAX.
YOUR SECURITY, THAT IS.
.....JUST THREE SHIKABANE STANDING GUARD IN THE HALLWAY.
I THINK EVEN KEITO IS ACTUALLY GRATEFUL TO YOU, DEEP DOWN.
FOR YOUR HELP WITH THE KING AND ALL.
HARDLY.
AND I CAN'T SAY THEY LOOKED LIKE REAL WINNERS, EITHER.
NOT THAT A SHIKABANE'S EXPRESSION CAN TELL YOU MUCH.

IF KEITO-SAN HAD HIS WAY, HE WOULD PLACE ME UNDER LOCK AND KEY UNTIL EVERYTHING WAS OVER AND DONE WITH.
BUT TO DO THAT WOULD BE TO IMPLICITLY ADMIT THAT HE FEELS HIS KING IS THREATENED BY A MERE HUMAN, NO.....? IT CONFOUNDS HIM.





ENDED UP EATING AKASHA'S FOOD

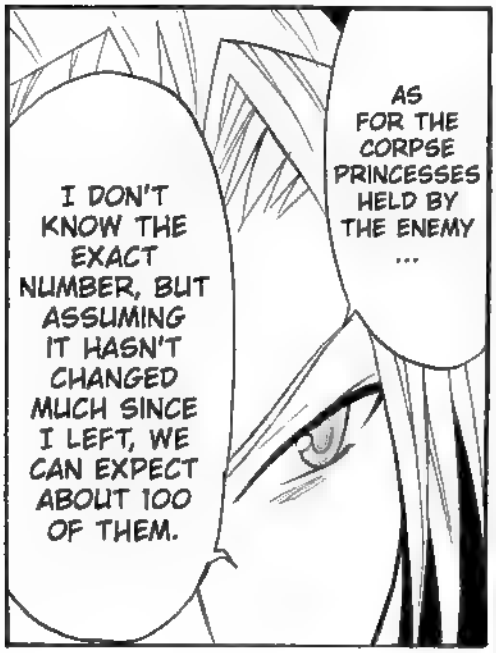
IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE PUZZLE YOU LAID OUT FOR US— THE INVASION OF YAMA CITY— WE NEED TWO ESSENTIAL PIECES.
モグ..
MUNCH
A FIGHTING FORCE...
...AND TRANS-PORT.

BOTH WOULD BE UNATTAINABLE WITHOUT THE MIGHT OF THE FOUNDERS.

FOR THE FIGHTING FORCE... AFTER KEITO PUT YOU IN HERE...
...HE STARTED VISITING GRAVES AND BURIAL MOUNDS IN ROKUHARA, OOEYAMA, FUNAOKA, AND OTHERS.
HE'S RECRUITING VENGEFUL SPIRITS WHO SHARED THE KING'S IDEALS AND FOUGHT UNDER HIM BACK WHEN THEY WERE HUMAN.
THEY'LL COME TO HIS AID ONCE MORE.

THOSE SHIKABANE BODIES WILL PROVIDE **SHOULDERS** FOR THE "SEVERED HEADS" OF THE SUPPORTERS THAT KEITO COMES BACK WITH.
MEANWHILE, AEGIS AND HIS COMPATRIOT GREGORIO ARE ON A HUNT FOR SHIKABANE NOT ALREADY ALLIED WITH THE UNCLEAN BUNCH.

THAT ALSO MEANS THAT WHEN IT COMES TIME TO INVADE, THE OVERALL NUMBER OF SHIKABANE IN THE COUNTRY WILL REMAIN HIGH, JUST AS YOU'D HOPED.
AND THEY'RE PRIORITIZING THE SHIKABANE THAT THE KOUGON SECT WOULD BE MOSTLY LIKELY TO TAKE OUT IN THE MEANTIME.

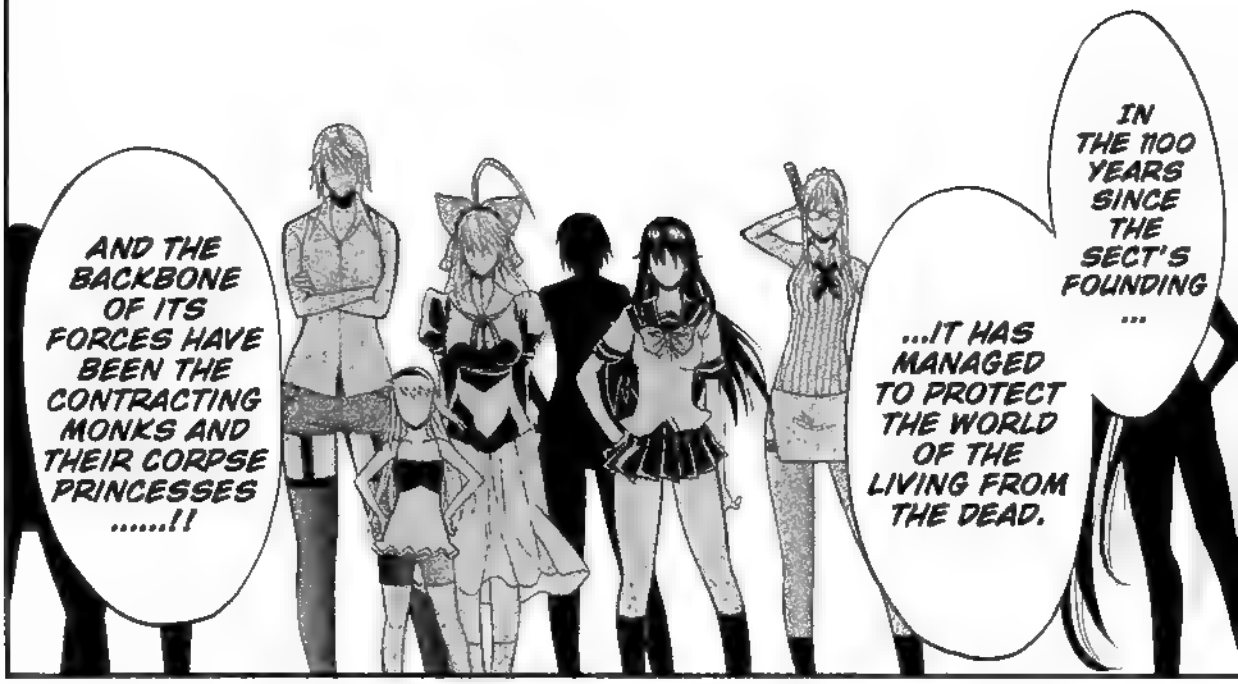

I DON'T KNOW THE EXACT NUMBER, BUT ASSUMING IT HASN'T CHANGED MUCH SINCE I LEFT, WE CAN EXPECT ABOUT 100 OF THEM.
AS FOR THE CORPSE PRINCESSES HELD BY THE ENEMY ...

...ALLOWS HIM TO **AMASS AND CONTROL THE DEAD.** HE'S NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO WIELD IT TO THIS EXTENT, SO WE OUGHT TO LET HIM.
YES.
AEGIS-SAN'S ABILITY AS A VARCOLACI KING...

IF WE GATHER THE NUMBER OF SHIKABANE WE HOPE TO.....
...AND INCLUDE OUR FORCES IN THE HIDEOUT NOW..... THAT IS, THE FOUNDERS, AS WELL AS CURSED, CASKET-BEARING SHIKABANE ...
THEN WE WILL OUTNUMBER THEIR CORPSE PRINCESSES BY A FACTOR OF TWO OR THREE.

IMPRESSIVE.
OVER-COMING THE NUMBERS GAME IS A BIG DEAL. ADD IN THE KING, AND NOTHING CAN STOP US.

NO... ABOVE ALL ELSE...
...WE MUSTN'T UNDERES-TIMATE THE KOUGON SECT'S CORPSE PRINCESSES AND CON-TRACTING MONKS.

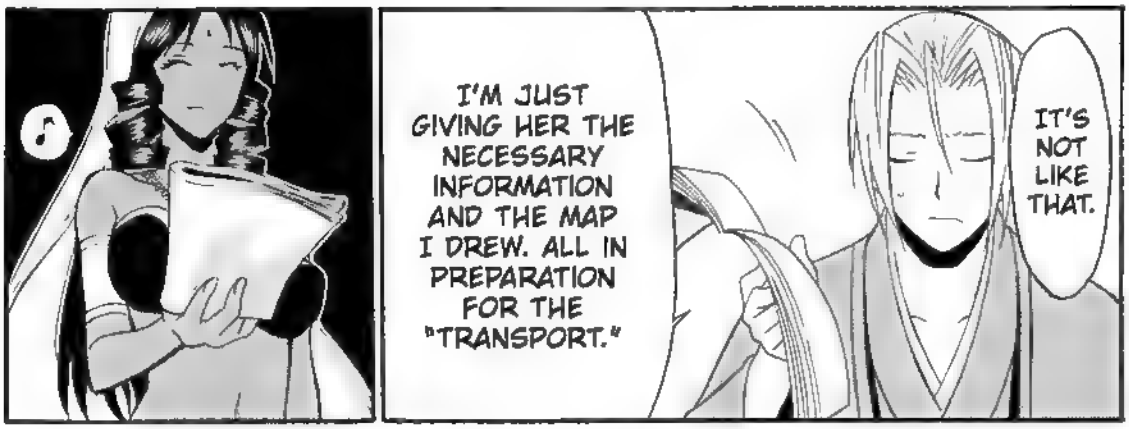

IN THE 1100 YEARS SINCE THE SECT'S FOUNDING ...
...IT HAS MANAGED TO PROTECT THE WORLD OF THE LIVING FROM THE DEAD.
AND THE BACKBONE OF ITS FORCES HAVE BEEN THE CONTRACTING MONKS AND THEIR CORPSE PRINCESSES .....!!

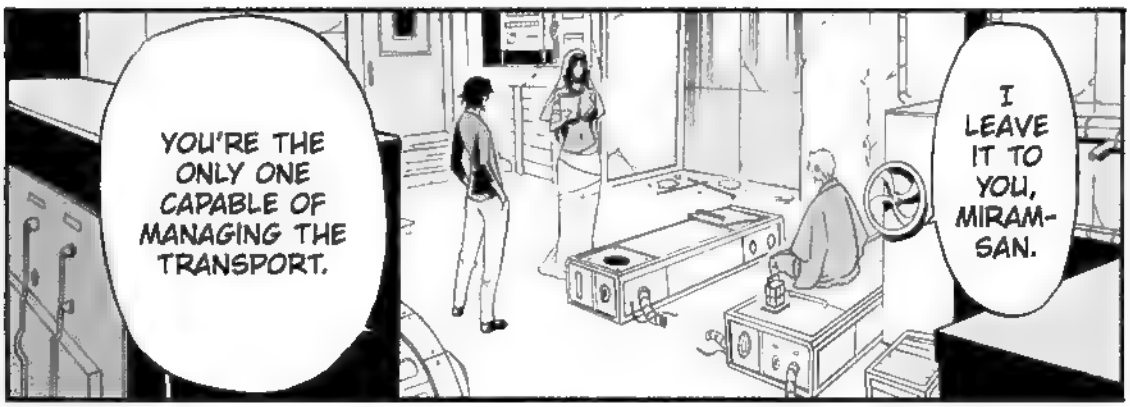
THEY HAVE CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE AND THEIR "BONDS" TO SUPPORT THEM...!!
IN SOME CASES, THEY HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO SURPASS EVEN THE FOUNDERS.
.....
YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT OVERSTATING THIS A BIT...?

...THE KOUGON SECT'S DAI-SOUJOU, SHINZE KAMIU!!
.....AND DON'T FORGET ...

A SUPPOSED DEITY INCARNATE, BROUGHT TO LIFE BY THE SECT'S FOUNDER'S ULTIMATE "DEATH MAIDEN SUTRA".....
I DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS, BUT IT'S SAID THAT HE'S JOINED BY A VERY SPECIAL CORPSE PRINCESS .....
..... YES, I AM.
YOU'RE SAYING WE OUGHT TO BE VIGILANT?
HMPH .....
.....I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THAT, BUT...
FOR THAT .....
.....THEN THERE'S THE OTHER PIECE. TRANSPORT.
APPEAR
PLEASE LEAVE THAT ASPECT TO ME, ROGERE GUSTAV.

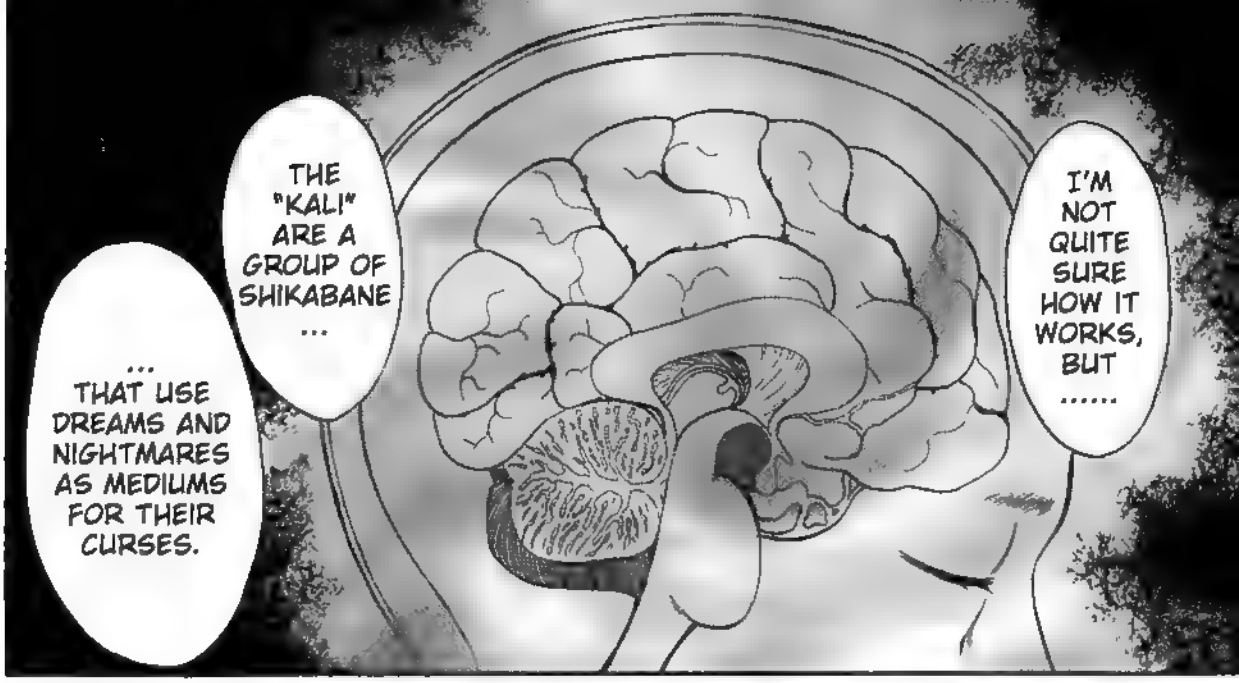
WHOA.
MIRAM!! WHY'RE YOU HERE!?
UFU..... I CAME TO SEE AKASHA.
EH!?


IT'S NOT LIKE THAT.
I'M JUST GIVING HER THE NECESSARY INFORMATION AND THE MAP I DREW. ALL IN PREPARATION FOR THE "TRANSPORT."


I LEAVE IT TO YOU, MIRAM-SAN.
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE CAPABLE OF MANAGING THE TRANSPORT.

THE PIECE THAT ENSURES THAT ON THE DAY OF THE INVASION .....
...THE KING, BOUND TO HIS SEALED THRONE, CAN BE ESCORTED TO YAMA CITY.....!!

THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION LIES IN OUR FOUNDER, HERE, MIRAM..... IN HER ABILITY.
SMILE
IF THE KING'S TRAPPED IN THAT SEAL, HOW DO WE GET HIM TO THE TARGETED TABOO REALM?
I'VE BEEN WONDERING ABOUT THAT SINCE THE START.
OF COURSE.
ALL YOU NEED DO IS DOZE OFF AND DRIFT INTO THAT DREAM.
TOUCH
MY "DREAM" IS ALL-POWERFUL.
YES, AKASHA.
.....
"DREAM"?
.....
YES.
FADE
SUBHA RATRI.*
* GOOD NIGHT.


I'M NOT QUITE SURE HOW IT WORKS, BUT .....
THE "KALI" ARE A GROUP OF SHIKABANE ...
... THAT USE DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES AS MEDIUMS FOR THEIR CURSES.

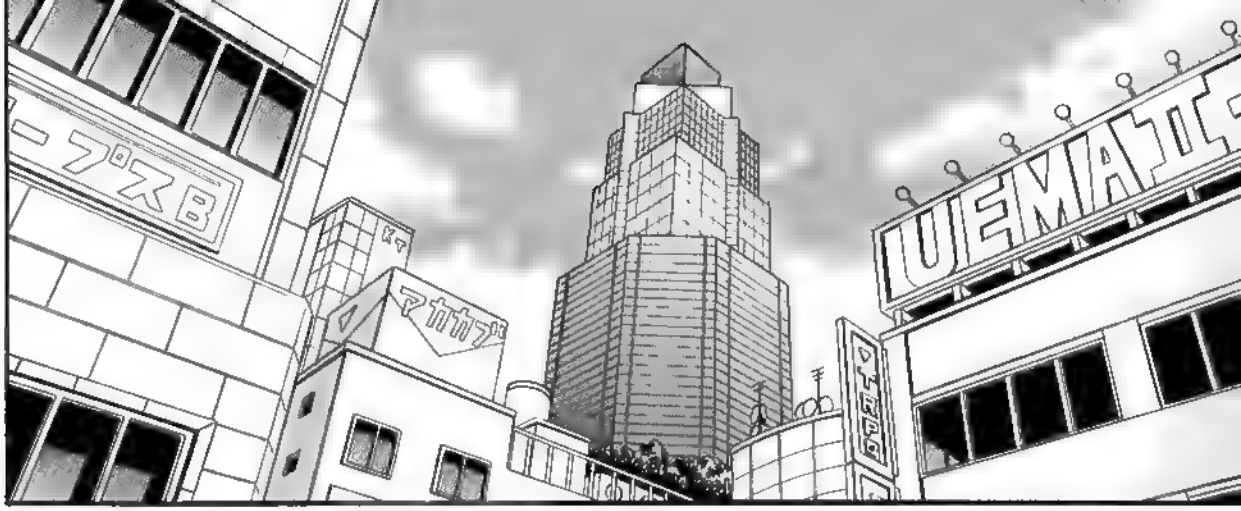
HMPH..... WELL, SOUNDS LIKE SHE'S THE RIGHT WOMAN FOR THE JOB, THEN.
CHOMP
YES.
EATING AGAIN...?

IF HER NIGHTMARE IS PLANTED IN MANY PEOPLE- SAY, EVERY PERSON IN YAMA CITY ON THE DAY OF THE INVASION —
...THEN HER OWN POWER INCREASES ACCORDINGLY. THE IMPOSSIBLE WILL BECOME POSSIBLE.

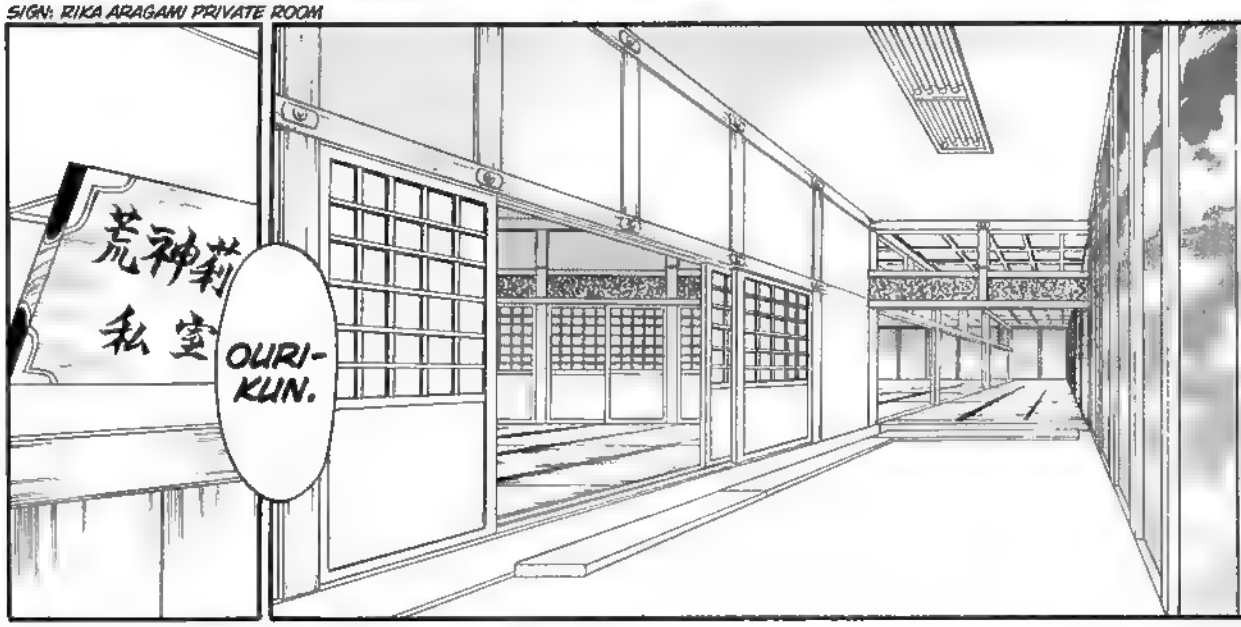
BEFORE THAT..... IT'S TIME YOU TALKED.
TELL ME WHY YOU REALLY BROUGHT THE UNCLEAN BUNCH TOGETH- ER.
!

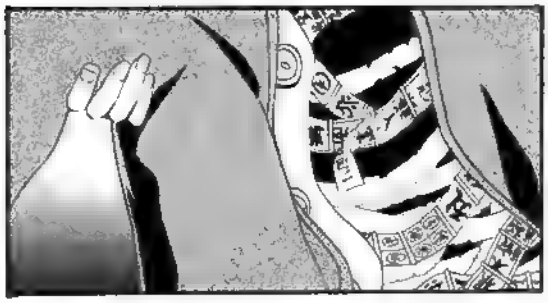
THAT'S EVERY- THING ON OUR END.
NOW, ABOUT THAT PERSONAL REQUEST OF YOURS ...

.....
IF IT WAS JUST REVENGE ON THE KOUGON SECT...
...
THEN YOU COULD'VE ALREADY TUCKED TAIL AND RAN.
NOW THAT THE KING'S REVIVED.
UP UNTIL NOW..... I SAW IT AS YOUR OWN BUSINESS, HONESTLY. AND IT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE MUCH GOOD COULD COME OF PRYING.
BUT NOW WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER, AND WE'RE IN IT DEEP.
..... YOU'RE A CURIOUS ONE, AREN'T YOU?
VERY WELL. I'LL TELL YOU.
MY TRUE OBJECTIVE .....
THE THING I'M TRULY AFTER, AT THE HEART OF THIS BATTLE, IS...!!



SIGN: RIKA ARAGAMI PRIVATE ROOM





THIS KASAYA WAS ACTUALLY KEI— IT WAS BROTHER TAGAMI'S.
!
I'D..... LIKE TO SAY IT'S FROM ME, BUT...
A GRADUATION GIFT OF SORTS, NOW THAT THE RITUAL'S OVER.

BIG BRO'S ?
YES.
EH? ...SO WHY...?

.....
I THINK, MAYBE ...
...AT THE TIME..... SHOU-SOUJOU TAGAMI ALREADY KNEW SOMETHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN .....

I'VE BEEN HOLDING ON TO IT...EVER SINCE SHOU-SOUJOU TAGAMI CAME HERE FOR THE LAST TIME.

FLAP
...KEEP IN MIND THAT IT WAS MADE TO COMBAT SHIKABANE CURSES AND PROTECT YOU FROM PHYSICAL HARM AS WELL.
YES.
BEYOND ITS USE AS A CATALYST FOR TECHNIQUES ...
IT'S FOR ME TO WEAR ?
IT WASN'T COMPLETE BACK THEN, SO I TAILORED IT APPROPRIATELY AFTER DECIDING TO PASS IT TO YOU, OURI-KUN.
UM..... ANYHOW !!

PAMPHLET: KOUMYOU SHINGON Q&A

LOOKIT THIS KICK!!
WHOA!!
FLIK
THANK YOU, RIKA-SAN!!
AND THE SUTRAS STITCHED INTO THE LINING WILL GRANT YOU A BLESSING THAT AUGMENTS YOUR AGILITY.
CHANTING THE MANTRA WHILE WEARING THE KASAYA WILL ACTIVATE THE AURA WITHIN YOU.
HA-HA-HA.
WA-HA-HA!! FORGET DUMB OLD SHIKABANE. WITH THIS ON...
WHOOSH
...I FEEL LIKE I COULD EVEN TAKE ON A PISSED-OFF HOSHIMURA-SAN!!
LEAP
LEAP
SPRING
WHOA!!
AWE-SOME!!
...WHAT YOU WOULD'VE WANTED?
IS THIS.....
AS YOU ARE NOW, THE EFFECT SHOULD LAST FOR ABOUT ONE MINUTE.
OF COURSE.
KEISEI-SAN.
.....OH?

COME TO THINK OF IT .....
WE'VE NEVER ACTUALLY SPARRED BEFORE.
SLIDE

LET'S DO IT, OURI.
KNOWING YOUR PARTNER'S STRENGTH IS KEY IN A REAL BATTLE.
CRACK
POP
EH
UMM .....
.....
WHAT'S THAT BLACK ENERGY ...?
HOLD ON!?
.....!!

IF.....I CAN GIVE HOSHIMURA-SAN A GOOD MATCH.....
HEH-HEH... THAT WAS SOME PUNCH. I REALLY FELT IT...
RIGHT BACK AT'CHA...
JUST MAYBE WE'LL DEVELOP THAT MUTUAL TRUST AND ADMIRATION .....!?
AND I WAS THINKING HOW I'D DO ANYTHING TO GET CLOSER TO HER.....
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
I STILL FEEL LIKE THERE'S THIS DISTANCE BETWEEN ME AND HOSHIMURA-SAN.
...JUST ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO GO ABOUT IT!?
CLENCH
AT TIMES LIKE THAT..... ISN'T "TALKING WITH FISTS" ...

GYAHHH.
POW
ANSWER: "NOT A CHANCE."
POW
...TOO WEAK.

UM... RIKA-SAN.
THIS MAY SEEM OUT OF THE BLUE, BUT...
EH?
SHE REALLY OVERDOES IT.....
IT'S TOO HARD FOR HER TO GIVE HIM A SINGLE WIN.

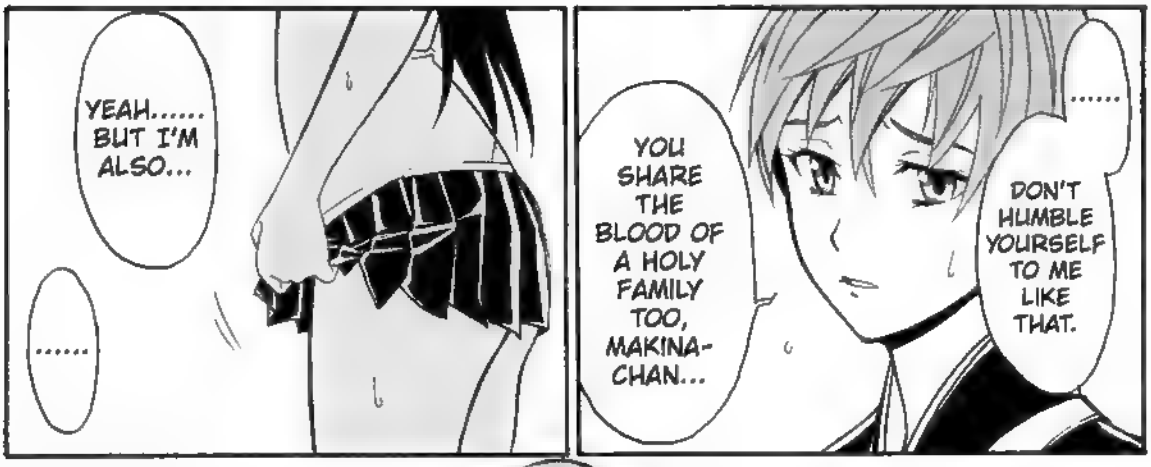
UGH...! YOU IDIOT!
...IS HE LAUGHING?
U-FU-FU-FU.

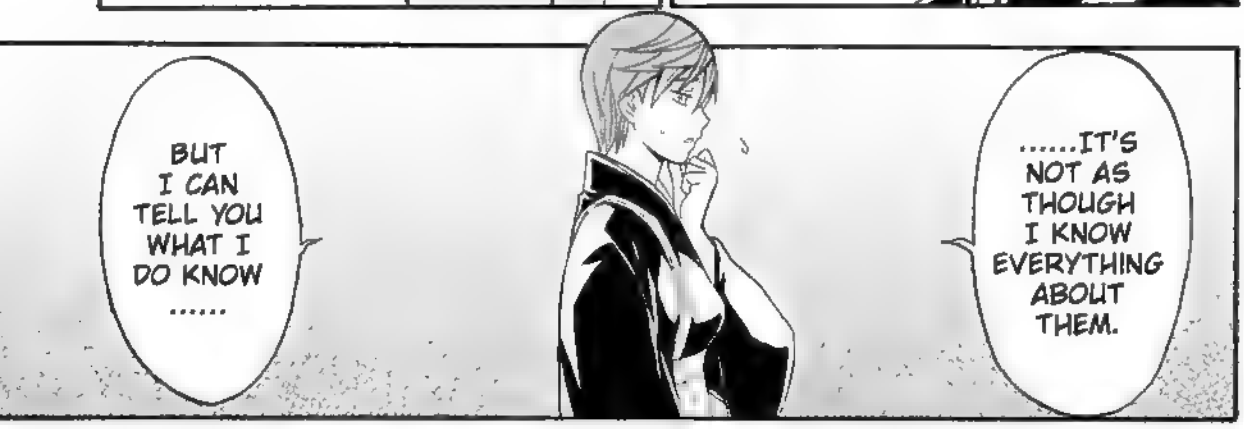
CAN YOU TELL ME ANYTHING ABOUT THEM?
THE "DEATH MAIDEN SUTRAS."

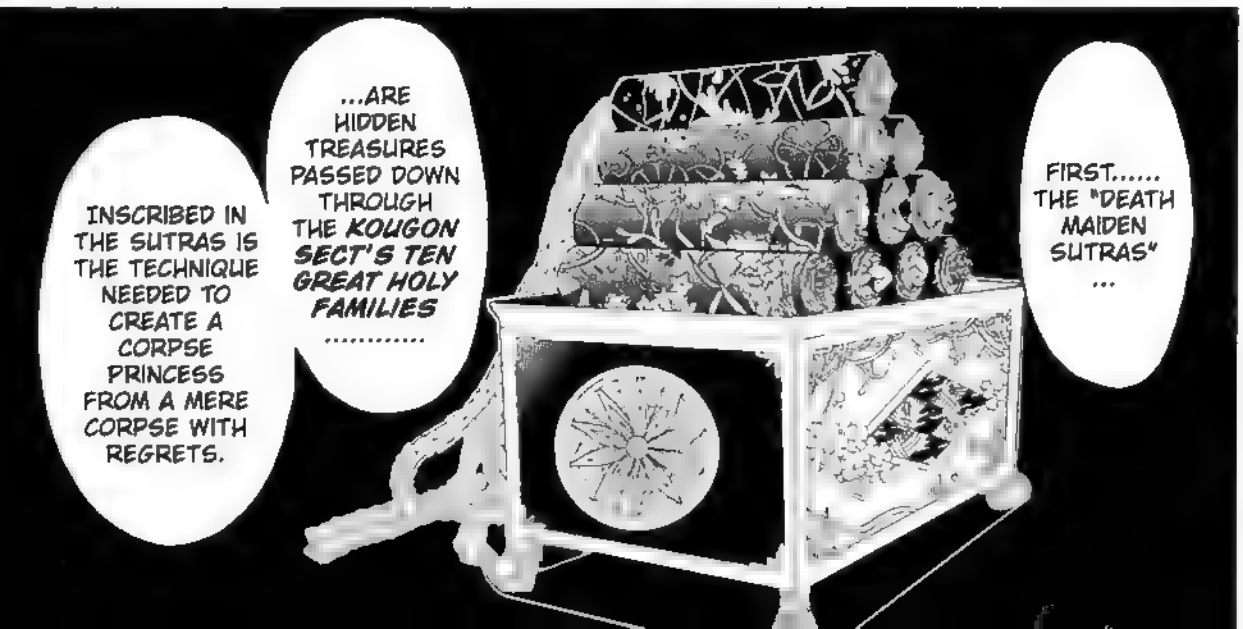
I NEED TO KNOW THE TRUTH.
..... WHY DO YOU ASK?
THE MOOD SUDDENLY CHANGED .....
.....? HUH?

"WHO" CAME? AND FOR "WHAT" !?
I GET THAT IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A SECRET TO EVERYONE BESIDES THE HOLY FAMILIES, BUT.....
YES... THE TRUTH. IF MY FAMILY WAS ATTACKED FOR A REASON, I WANT TO KNOW IT.....

PLEASE.
RIKA-SAMA OF THE ARAGAMI HOLY FAMILY.
IF IT WAS REALLY FOR THAT SUTRA..... THEN I NEED TO KNOW!!
EVEN WITHOUT THE "WHO," IF I KNOW THE "WHAT".....


YEAH..... BUT I'M ALSO...
.....
YOU SHARE THE BLOOD OF A HOLY FAMILY TOO, MAKINA-CHAN...
.....
DON'T HUMBLE YOURSELF TO ME LIKE THAT.

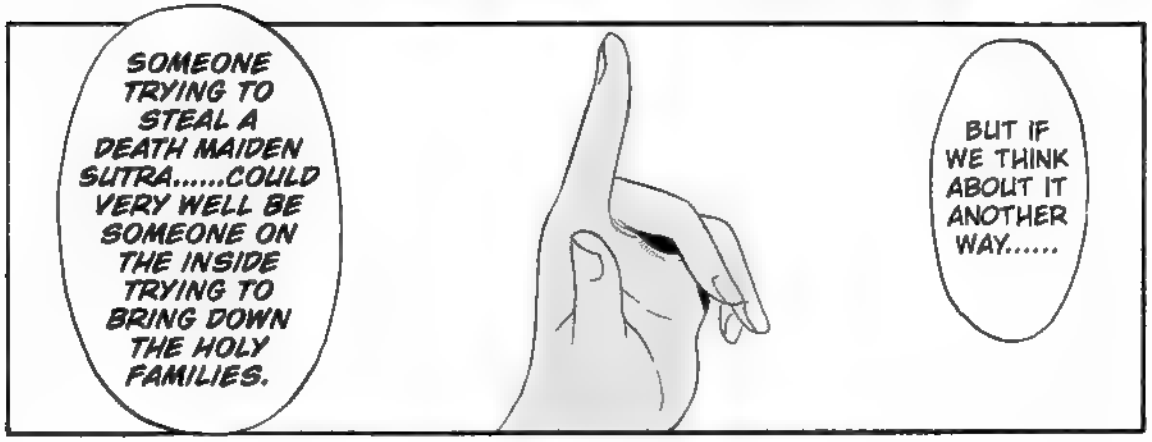

BUT I CAN TELL YOU WHAT I DO KNOW .....
.....IT'S NOT AS THOUGH I KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THEM.


INSCRIBED IN THE SUTRAS IS THE TECHNIQUE NEEDED TO CREATE A CORPSE PRINCESS FROM A MERE CORPSE WITH REGRETS.
...ARE HIDDEN TREASURES PASSED DOWN THROUGH THE KOUGON SECT'S TEN GREAT HOLY FAMILIES .....
FIRST..... THE "DEATH MAIDEN SUTRAS" ...

IT'S NOT AS THOUGH I UNDERSTAND THE COMPLETE STRUCTURE OR CONTENTS.
ALL I KNOW..... IS THE PART OF THE TECHNIQUE THAT I NEEDED TO TURN SAKI INTO A CORPSE PRINCESS .....
RIKA-KAKA...!
THERE'S NO TIME!! HURRY!!
FOR MAKING A CORPSE PRINCESS FROM A BODY THAT'S BEEN INTERMINGLED PRESERVATION FOR TEN YEARS.
SAKI!
BUT... IT'S ALREADY DECIDED.
YES..... I KNOW THAT.
I'LL BE THE ONE TO SAVE YOU!!
THIS TIME
AS SOON AS I KNEW SHE HAD THE APTITUDE TO BECOME A CORPSE PRINCESS

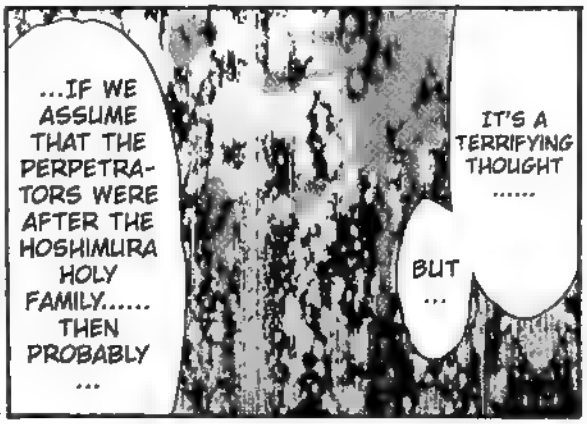
!!

THE DEATH MAIDEN SUTRAS ARE THE KOUGON SECT'S GREATEST TABOO, BUT ALSO ITS GREATEST ASSET.
THE SECRET IS A STATUS SYMBOL, AND MONOPOLIZING THE RITUAL IS WHAT'S SET THE HOLY FAMILIES APART FROM THE OTHERS.
NATURALLY, KEEPING THE SUTRAS FROM BEING DISTRIBUTED OR USED FOR EVIL IS A TOP PRIORITY.


SOMEONE TRYING TO STEAL A DEATH MAIDEN SUTRA.....COULD VERY WELL BE SOMEONE ON THE INSIDE TRYING TO BRING DOWN THE HOLY FAMILIES.
BUT IF WE THINK ABOUT IT ANOTHER WAY.....

.....THAT POSSIBILITY ALSO EXISTS.
OR...IT COULD BE AN OUTSIDE PARTY TRYING TO STEAL THE KOUGON SECT'S CORPSE PRINCESS SECRETS .....

EITHER WAY..... IT'S LIKELY THAT HUMANS WERE INVOLVED .....
!
THANK YOU.


...IF WE ASSUME THAT THE PERPETRATORS WERE AFTER THE HOSHIMURA HOLY FAMILY..... THEN PROBABLY ...
BUT ...
IT'S A TERRIFYING THOUGHT .....

.....NO, THAT'S ALRIGHT, RIKA-SAN.

YOU COULD ALWAYS ASK TAKAMINE-SAMA, WHO'S ALSO FROM A HOLY FAMILY.....
NOT AT ALL..... I'M SORRY I DON'T KNOW MORE .....

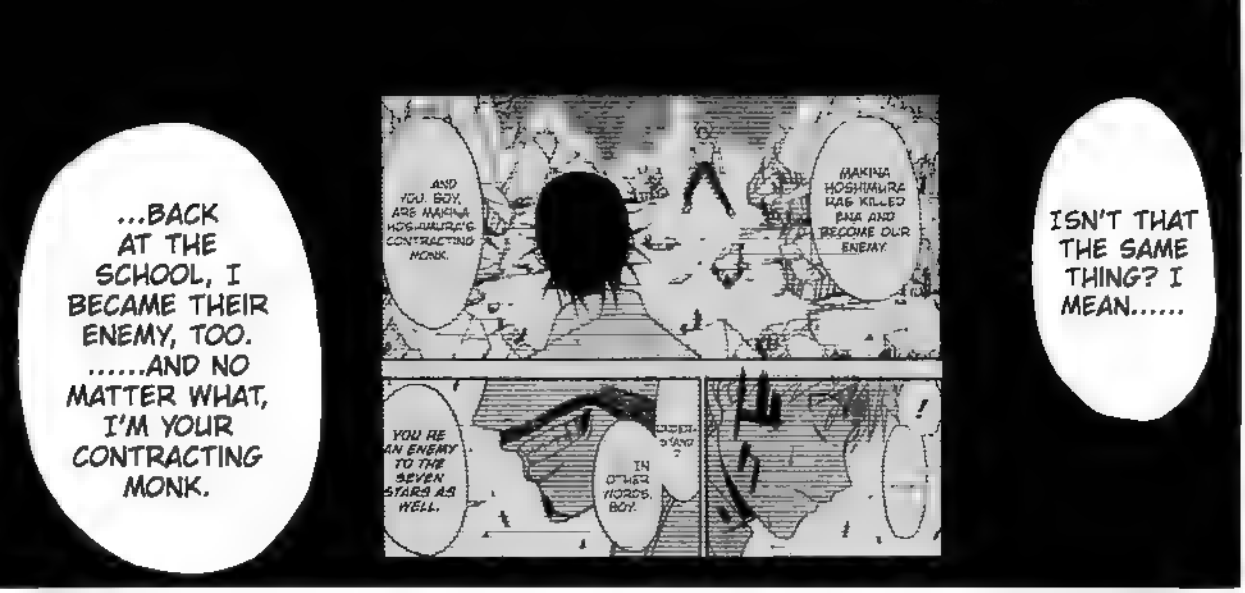
...DIRECTLY FROM THE SEVEN STARS THEMSELVES .....!
I'LL LEARN WHAT I NEED TO...

IT'S "WE'LL"..... RIGHT!?
BEAT-UP

AW, COME ON, HOSHI-MURA-SAN.
IT'S NOT "I'LL"!

SAKI! SHHH.
I GOTTA GIVE IT TO HIM FOR THAT POSITIVE, NEVER-SAY-DIE ATTITUDE.
...CRAZY THAT HE CAN GET UP AND SAY A THING LIKE THAT AFTER BEING BEAT SENSELESS.

THE SEVEN STARS..... ARE MY ENEMIES.
THANKS, OURI... BUT...


...BACK AT THE SCHOOL, I BECAME THEIR ENEMY, TOO. .....AND NO MATTER WHAT, I'M YOUR CONTRACTING MONK.
AND YOU, BOY, ARE MAKINA HOSHIMURA'S CONTRACTING MONK.
MAKINA HOSHIMURA HAS KILLED ANA AND BECOME OUR ENEMY.
YOU'RE AN ENEMY TO THE SEVEN STARS AS WELL.
IN OTHER WORDS, BOY.
!
ISN'T THAT THE SAME THING? I MEAN.....

NO.
THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS.
.....
YEAH.
I WISH..... I COULD'VE KEPT YOU OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT ALTOGETHER .....
I GET IT...AND I'M GRATEFUL FOR YOUR DETERMINATION, OURI.
..... BUT...

I'M NO LONGER HUMAN. .....I'M A CORPSE PRINCESS.
YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING.

TUG
OKAY.
THEN CAN YOU DO THIS, OURI?
?
I KNOW THAT.....
RIGHT NOW, CAN YOU...
...GOUGE OUT MY EYE.....?
!?

IMAGINE ...
...THAT DOING SO WOULD SOMEHOW HELP KILL A SHIKABANE .....
...!?
WHA —?
WHAT .....?
A GOOD CONTRACTING MONK HAS TO ACT WITHOUT HESITATION... SO...
...!
!!
UWAH .....
STOP THAT .....!!
...DO IT, OURI?
COULD YOU...
PIERCE

FSSHH
HAA-
HAA.

GOUGING YOUR EYE OUT HERE AND NOW..... WHAT'S THE POINT.....!?
..... I DON'T GET IT .....!!

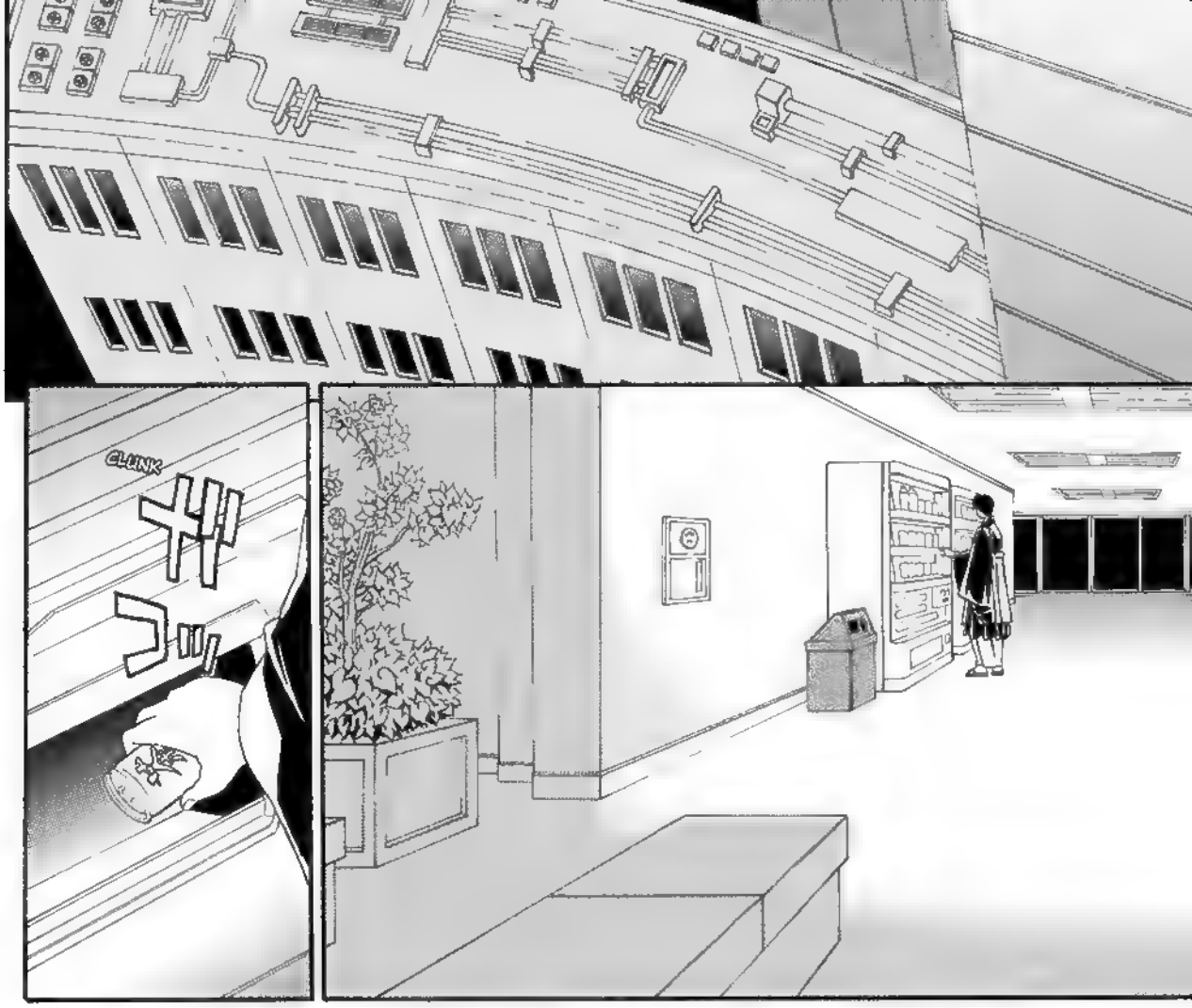
DETERMINED TO THROW AWAY MY HUMANITY.
DETERMINED TO BE A CORPSE PRINCESS.
I'M HERE TODAY..... BECAUSE I'M DETERMINED.

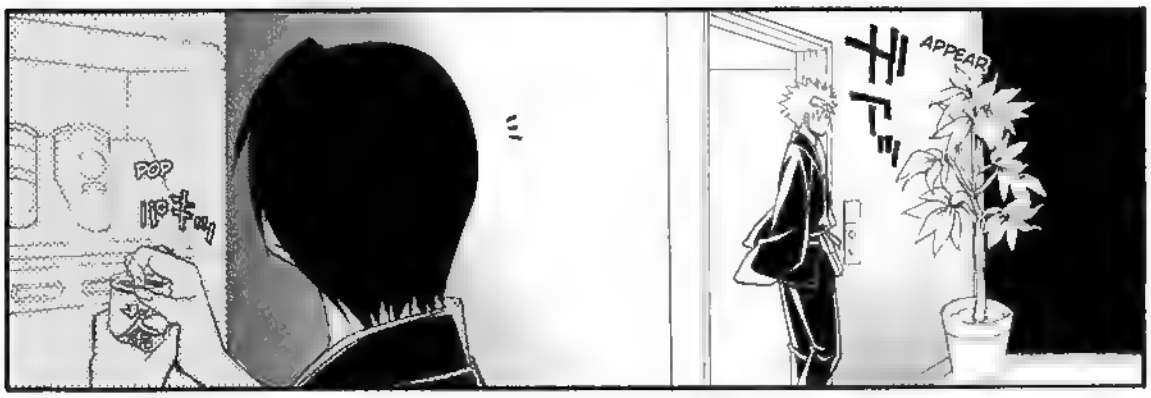
WHAT'S THROWN AWAY SHOULD BE FORGOTTEN.
AND ..... BECAUSE THOSE MEMORIES ARE SO PAINFUL...

MY LIFE IS NOT A HUMAN LIFE.
IT'S A TEMPORARY ONE THAT LASTS AS LONG AS MY REGRETS DO.

A LIFE THAT EXISTS TO TAKE REVENGE BY KILLING THE SEVEN STARS.

AN ILLUSION THAT'S DESTINED TO FADE AWAY.


CLUNK
ガコッ

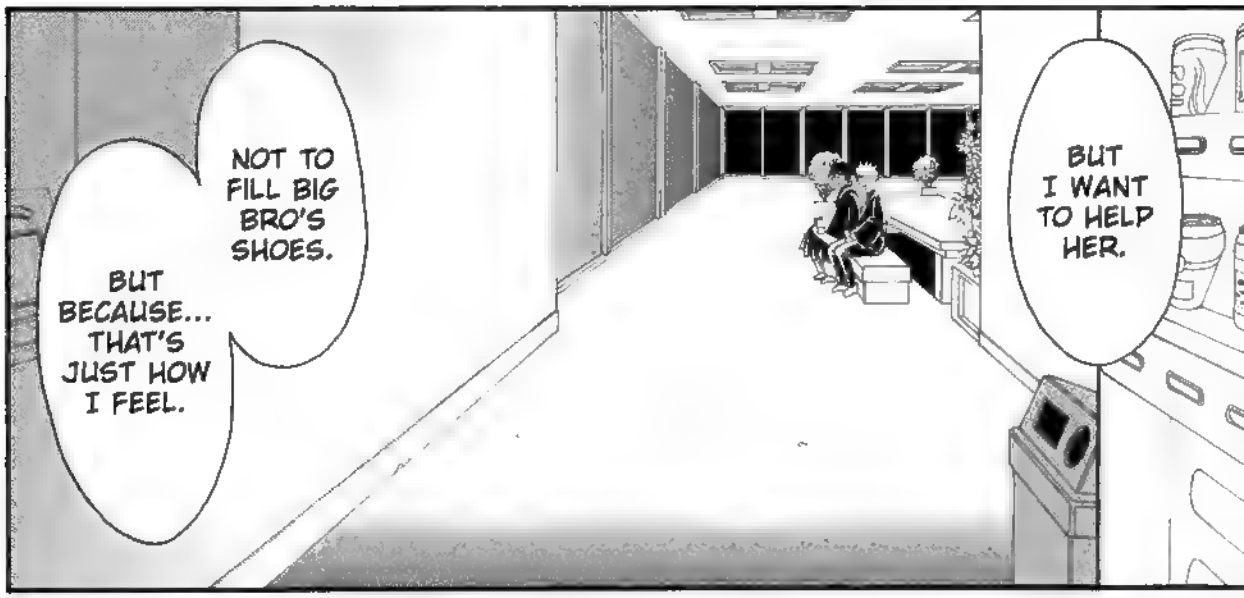

POP
APPEAR

AH...
.....
OURI?

I..... WANTED TO TALK TO YOU, TAKAMASA-SAN.
YEAH .....
YOU DON'T COME INTO THE OFFICE THAT OFTEN.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
.....
SOMETHING BOTHERING YOU?
.....
YES.
TO ME ...?
IN THE END...YOU CAN'T SEEM TO JOIN HOSHIMURA-SAN'S FIGHT AND HELP EASE HER REGRETS .....?
..... IS IT THAT, NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY ...
..... YES.
!!

AND I KNOW THAT, SO...
IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN SAY ANYTHING.

HOSHIMURA-SAN..... SHE'S ALWAYS FIGHTING FOR HER LIFE.....


NOT TO FILL BIG BRO'S SHOES.
BUT BECAUSE... THAT'S JUST HOW I FEEL.
BUT I WANT TO HELP HER.

.....
THAT WAY OF THINKING IS DANGEROUS .....

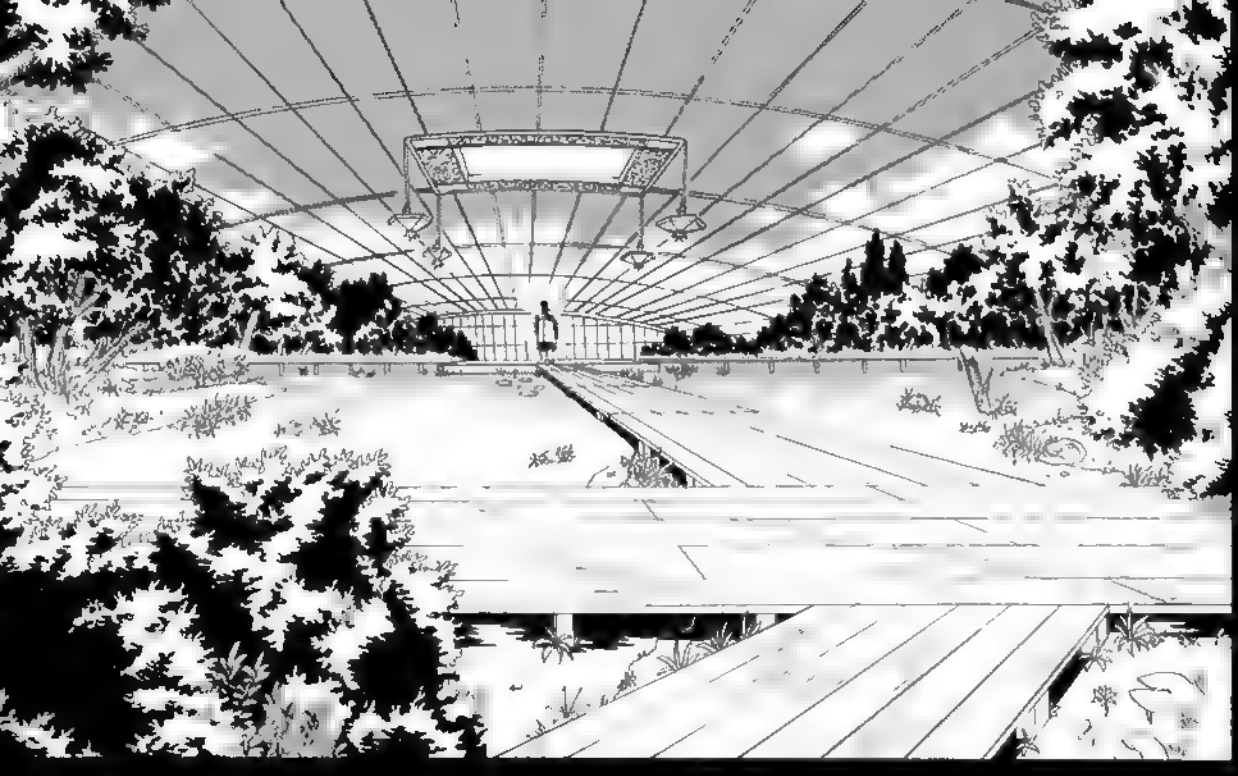
LIKE, IF I WORK HARD...
MAYBE I CAN HELP GET HOSHIMURA-SAN THAT MUCH CLOSER TO HER GOAL... BUT.....

CORPSE PRIN-CESSES... AREN'T HUMAN.
THEY'RE ABERRATIONS MADE TO KILL SHIKABANE.
EH?
DIDN'T I MAKE IT CLEAR?
IF YOU CAN'T..... TAKE THAT TO HEART...
.....
IT'LL RUIN YOU...
THAT DANGEROUS MINDSET...!!

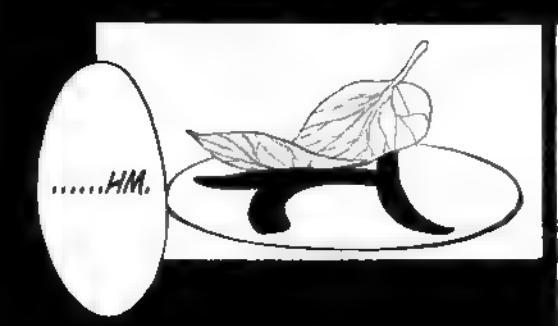
A WHILE BACK .....
.....
...THERE WAS.....A CONTRACTING MONK WHO, LIKE YOU, FOUGHT FOR HIS CORPSE PRINCESS'S SAKE.

I'M THINKING..... *HIS* STORY MIGHT PROVIDE YOU WITH A GOOD EXAMPLE OF WHAT NOT TO DO.
OR SO I HEAR.

IN THE END ...
HE HAD TO BE PUNISHED.
HE HAD TO BEAR THE WEIGHT OF HIS SINS.

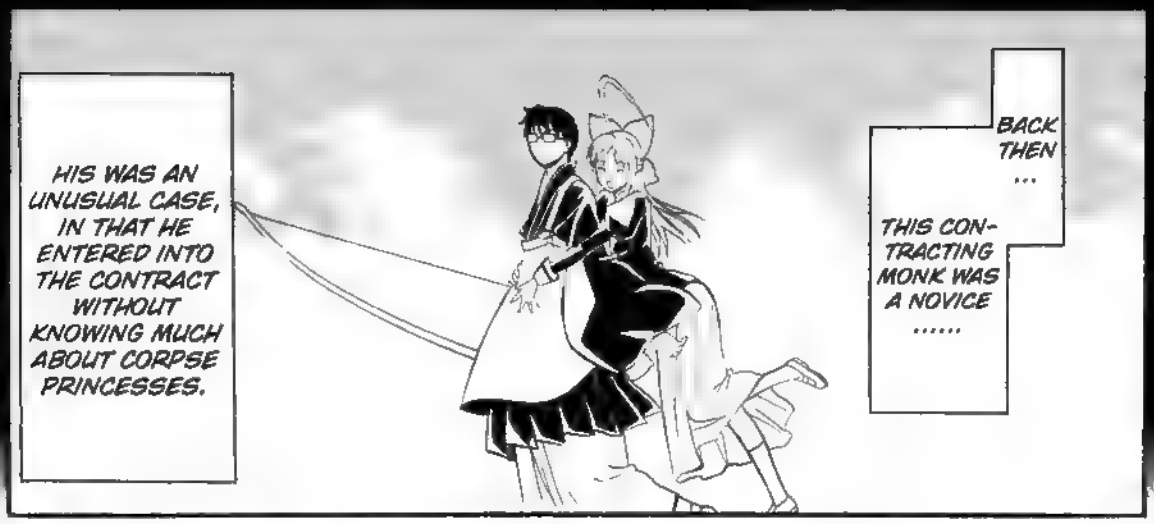


TOUKA.


.....HM.

はら FRET
はら FRET

NOW, THE RESULTS OF THE BONDING RITUAL..... YOU ARE BOUND TO KANNON BODDHISATTVA.
CALLED "AVALOKITESVARA" IN SANSKRIT, SHE IS THE "EYE" OF SALVATION WHO OVERSEES REINCARNATION IN ALL OF THE SIX REALMS.
THE DIVINE PROTECTION GRANTED YOU COMES IN THE FORM OF SUPERIOR SIGHT AND A SIXTH SENSE THAT ALLOWS YOU TO PERCEIVE THE TRUE NATURE OF ALL THINGS.
YOU RITUAL TOOLS WILL BE HANDHELD ITEMS TO DRIVE AWAY EVIL... BELLS, JEWELS..... AND BOWS.
GREAT JOB, TAKAMASA !!
HUG
WHOA.
I'M SO RELIEVED YOU MANAGED TO CREATE A BOND.
CAN YOU IMAGINE? WHAT IF IT DIDN'T WORK AND OUR CONTRACT HAD TO END JUST LIKE THAT?
MM-HM.


HIS WAS AN UNUSUAL CASE, IN THAT HE ENTERED INTO THE CONTRACT WITHOUT KNOWING MUCH ABOUT CORPSE PRINCESSES.
BACK THEN ...
THIS CONTRACTING MONK WAS A NOVICE .....

JUST LIKE YOU, NOW, OURI.
..... YES.

SO..... TO HIM, HIS CORPSE PRINCESS ...
...WAS HIS BEST FRIEND. HIS COMRADE IN ARMS.
BUT MORE THAN THAT, SHE WAS A GIRL.

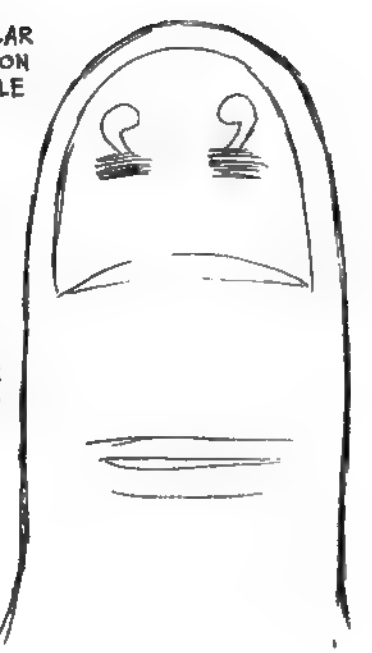
THEY BOTH STROVE TO BECOME STRONGER FOR EACH OTHER.
THEY TRAINED .....
THEY EN-COUR-AGED EACH OTHER.
THEY FOUGHT SHIKA-BANE.

AND EVEN-TUALLY ...
...EACH WOULD COME TO FEEL THAT THE OTHER WAS IRRE-PLACE-ABLE...

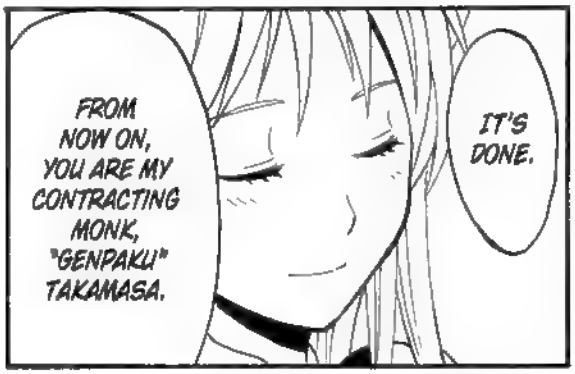
A SECRETLY POPULAR FAD AT THE KOUGON SECT HEAD TEMPLE

DAI-SOUJOU NAIL ART

(MOSTLY DRAWN ON DURING SPARE TIME WITH MAGIC MARKERS AND QUICKLY WASHED OFF WITH WATER)



DEATH 37: REMINISCENCE (PART 2)



.....
EH?
YOU ARE..... "GENPAKU" TAKAMASA, RIGHT?
YEAH. THAT'S MY MONK NAME, OR WHATEVER. .....THE NAME I'LL INHERIT WHEN I TAKE OVER THE FAMILY TEMPLE
...BUT WHAT'S A CONTRACTING MONK? WHAT'S A "CORPSE PRINCESS"?

ずずず・・・
SINK SINK SINK
AH.
AHH.
SWAY
ずるっ・・・
...

UWAHH !?
ARE YOU BROKEN?
とさっ
THUMP
AH-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA.

CRYING AS SHE EATS AND MUMBLES TO HERSELF..... IS SHE A TOTAL AIRHEAD?
MAYBE EATING SOME ICE CREAM WILL CALM ME DOWN..... AH. SO YUMMY! ♡
AND TO TOP IT ALL OFF, I GOT A CIVILIAN INVOLVED. DUNNO WHAT TO DO NOW.....
HOW DO I KEEP MANAGING TO SCREW UP WHEN IT MATTERS MOST.....?
I'M SICK OF BEING SO DUMB .....
NO, THAT'S NOT ENOUGH.
ずーん
GLOOM
もぐもぐ
MUNCH!
もぐもぐ
MUNCH!

DEATH 37: REMINISCENCE (PART 2)

HEH-HEH.
AND SHE WAS ALL THE STIMULATION HE NEEDED.

THOUGH A BIT OF AN AIRHEAD AND A SCREWUP... THIS GIRL WAS CHEERINESS INCARNATE .....

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
STIMU-LATION .....?

...WAS A PROMINENT WARRIOR FAMILY FOR THE KOUGON SECT, AND HIS FATHER WAS AN AMAZING CONTRACTING MONK.....
HIS FAMILY .....
YES .....

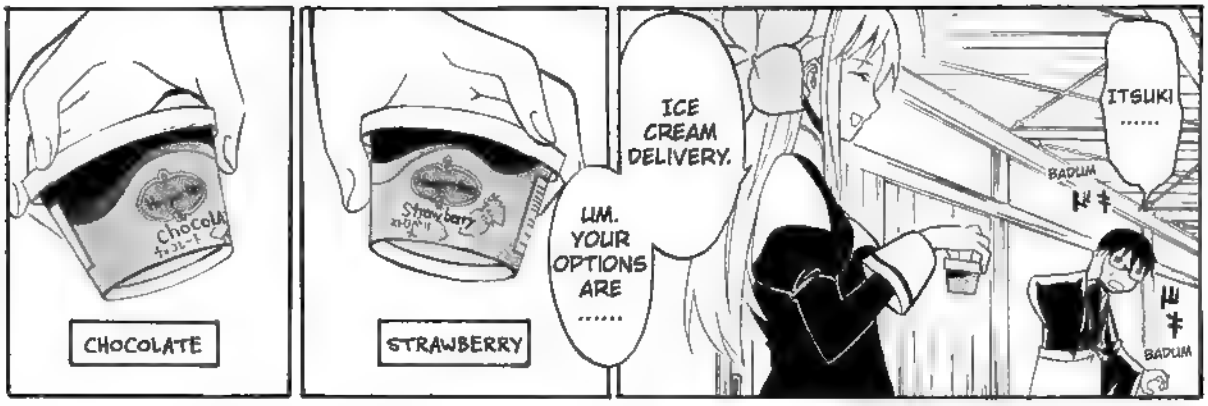
SO THIS BOY..... VERY WELL MIGHT'VE GONE ON TO LIVE AN ORDINARY, AIMLESS LIFE, IGNORANT OF THE TRUTH.....
HOWEVER..... HIS FATHER PASSED AWAY WITHOUT EVER MENTIONING THOSE THINGS .....

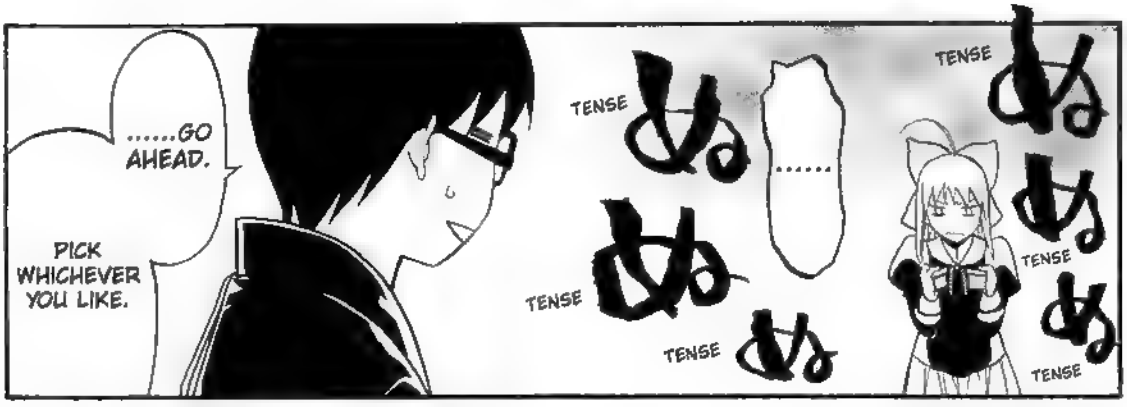
MORE THAN MERE COINCIDENCE, OUR "BONDS" ARE GOVERNED BY FATE ITSELF.....
.....
BUT THEN HE MET HER.
.....
WE HAVE LOST THE KEY AND CONSCIOUSNESS, AND WE SUBMIT AS WE WALK THE INTERSTICE OF THIS WORLD'S JUSTICE
AND YOU'VE INHERITED AN ESSENTIAL SIMPLE.
SHIN-GON
IN OTHER WORDS
YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF EACH REGION'S PROTEC-TOR
WHO ARE YOU?
SHE APPEARED IN HIS LIFE LIKE A GUST...
...THERE TO CLEAR THE CLOUDS AWAY.

FWIP
SPLIT
THUNK
THUNK
THUNK

HMPH.
ONLY THREE .....
..... STILL NEEDS WORK.

TOUGH
WHOA!?
TAAAKA-MASA.
Strawberry


CHOCOLATE
STRAWBERRY
UM. YOUR OPTIONS ARE .....
ICE CREAM DELIVERY.
ITSUKI .....
BADUM
BADUM


.....GO AHEAD.
PICK WHICHEVER YOU LIKE.
TENSE
TENSE
TENSE
TENSE
TENSE
TENSE
TENSE

I FEEL LIKE SHE'S TRYING TO FOOL ME WITH THAT SMILE.....OR WIN ME OVER WITH FOOD?
..... MHM.
GULP
SO YUMMY.
CHOCOLATE

I THINK IT'S FINALLY READY TO USE IN ACTUAL COMBAT.
MY "SIX REALM EXOR-CISM."
HUH? YEAH.
WHAT WAS THAT THING YOU WERE DOING? "SEALED MANDALA"?
... HEY.

SMILE
SMILE
THEY SAY IT TAKES YEARS TO MASTER ONE COMPLETELY, BUT I.....
!
CLENCH
THEY'RE THE ONLY THING THAT CAN ACTUALLY DAMAGE A SHIKABANE .....
BESIDES CORPSE PRINCESSES THEMSELVES, SEALED MANDALAS ARE A CONTRACTING MONK'S STRONGEST BATTLE TECHNIQUE.

I'M CHEERING YOU ON.
I KNOW YOU CAN MASTER IT SOONER THAN THAT, TAKAMASA.
RIGHT.

WIPE
WAHH .....
AHAH! YOU GOT SOME ICE CREAM ON YOUR CHIN.
UHH. AH.
WH—
BADUM
BADUM
NO NEED TO GET ALL FIDGETY.
LICK
BR- BREAK'S OVER!! BACK TO TRAINING.
? OKAY.
STAND
..... IS THAT REALLY OKAY?
YEAH! MY TRAINING'S OVER FOR TODAY.
I'LL WATCH YOU TRAIN, TAKAMASA.
"OKAY" ...?
WHAT ABOUT YOU?

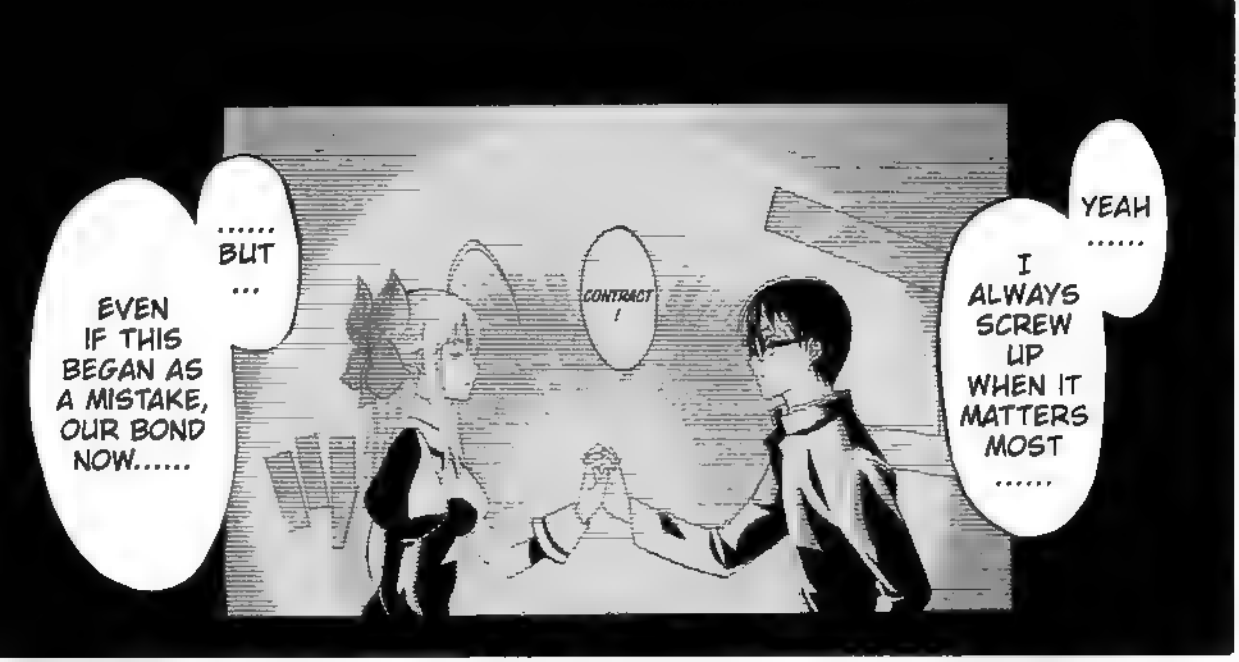
...NAH. YOU'RE FINE.
BUT THIS MIGHT GET BORING.
BUT..... AM I BOTHERING YOU...?
ALSO..... BEING NEAR YOU MEANS OUR BOND WILL GET STRONGER..... AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I'VE HEARD...
BAM
PULL
THUNK
FWIP

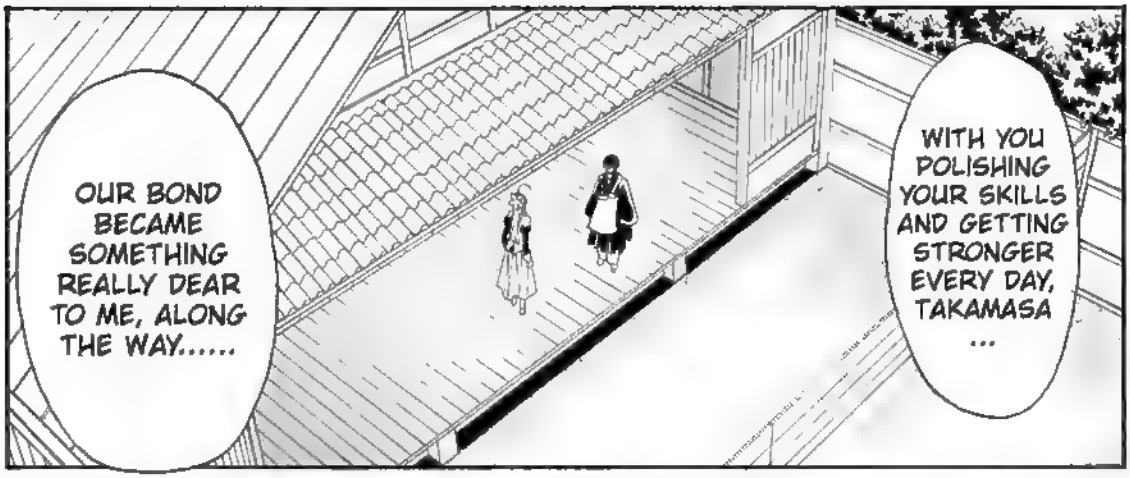
IT'S NOT..... BORING AT ALL.
EH?

ONE YEAR AGO..... WE MET WHEN YOU WERE A HIGH SCHOOL SECOND-YEAR.
AND I'VE WATCHED YOU GROW STRONGER EVERY DAY, TAKAMASA.
IT'S PROOF THAT, AS A CONTRACTING MONK, YOU'RE A TRUE "GENPAKU."

.....
...SO THANK YOU, TAKA-MASA.
?
?
..... FOR WHAT?

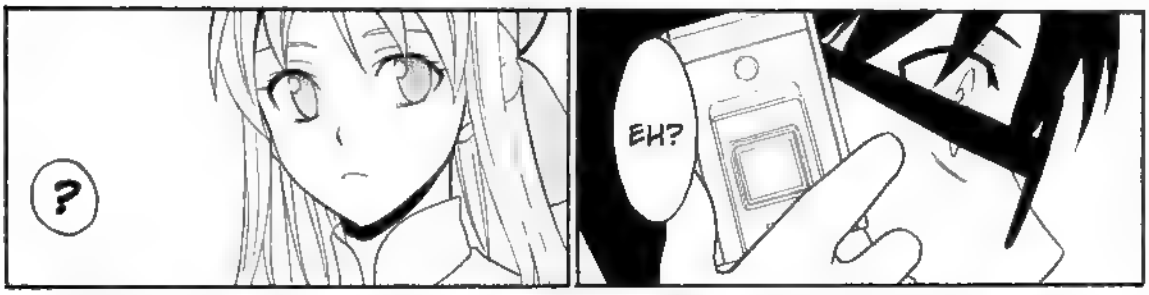
IT'S MOSTLY BECAUSE YOU'RE MY CONTRACTING MONK...
...THAT I CAN FIND THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT.
WATCHING YOU WORK SO HARD...
IT ALWAYS INSPIRES ME.
IT ALL SEEMED SO IMPOSSIBLE AT FIRST, FOR ME .....
I BECAME A CORPSE PRINCESS..... I WAS GIVEN ANOTHER SHOT AT LIFE.....
BUT I'D NEVER FOUGHT BEFORE. I WAS A SCAREDY-CAT WHO COULD NEVER HOPE TO WIN AGAINST A SHIKABANE. .....I WAS CONVINCED OF THAT.
I..... WANTED TO FIND A STRONG CONTRACTING MONK WHO COULD FIGHT FOR ME.
SO DID A BUNCH OF RESEARCH .....
.....MY "GENPAKU" FATHER HAD ALREADY PASSED AWAY, BUT...
CHUCKLE
YOU MISTOOK ME FOR HIM, AND MADE OUR CONTRACT .....


YEAH .....
I ALWAYS SCREW UP WHEN IT MATTERS MOST .....
CONTRACT !
..... BUT ...
EVEN IF THIS BEGAN AS A MISTAKE, OUR BOND NOW.....

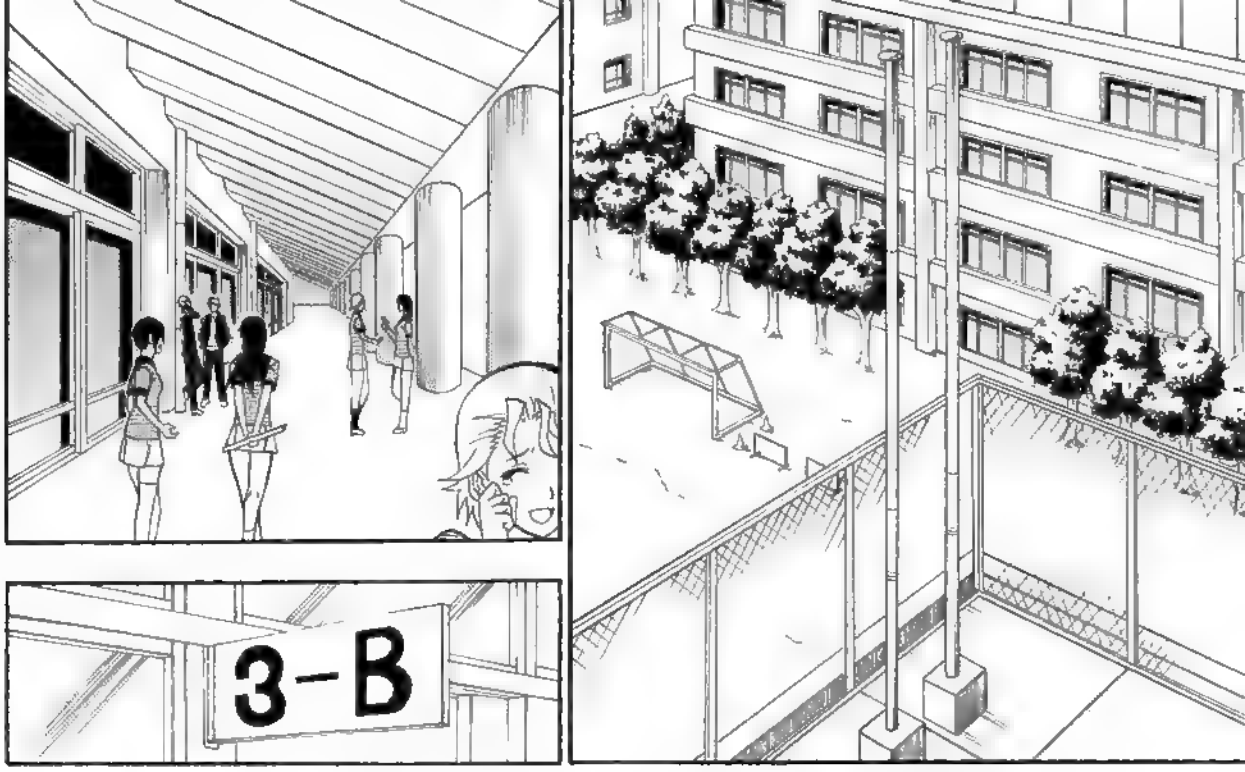

WITH YOU POLISHING YOUR SKILLS AND GETTING STRONGER EVERY DAY, TAKAMASA ...
OUR BOND BECAME SOMETHING REALLY DEAR TO ME, ALONG THE WAY.....

THAT'S WHY...
I'VE... NEVER BEEN MORE GRATEFUL FOR ONE OF MY SCREW-UPS.

I'M NO MATCH.....
...OH BOY.
FU... FU-FU.
.....
...AGAINST THAT SMILE OF HERS.....
TOTALLY DEFENSELESS .....
RINNNG
Incoming Call
I...
.....ITSUKI.
EH?
?
SERI-OUSLY..... JUST ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER.
NOT SURE IF YOU'VE PICKED UP ON IT, BUT.....I JUST NEED YOU TO KNOW THAT...



SIGNS: TATSUZAKURA HIGH GRADUATION CEREMONY / TATSUZAKURA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL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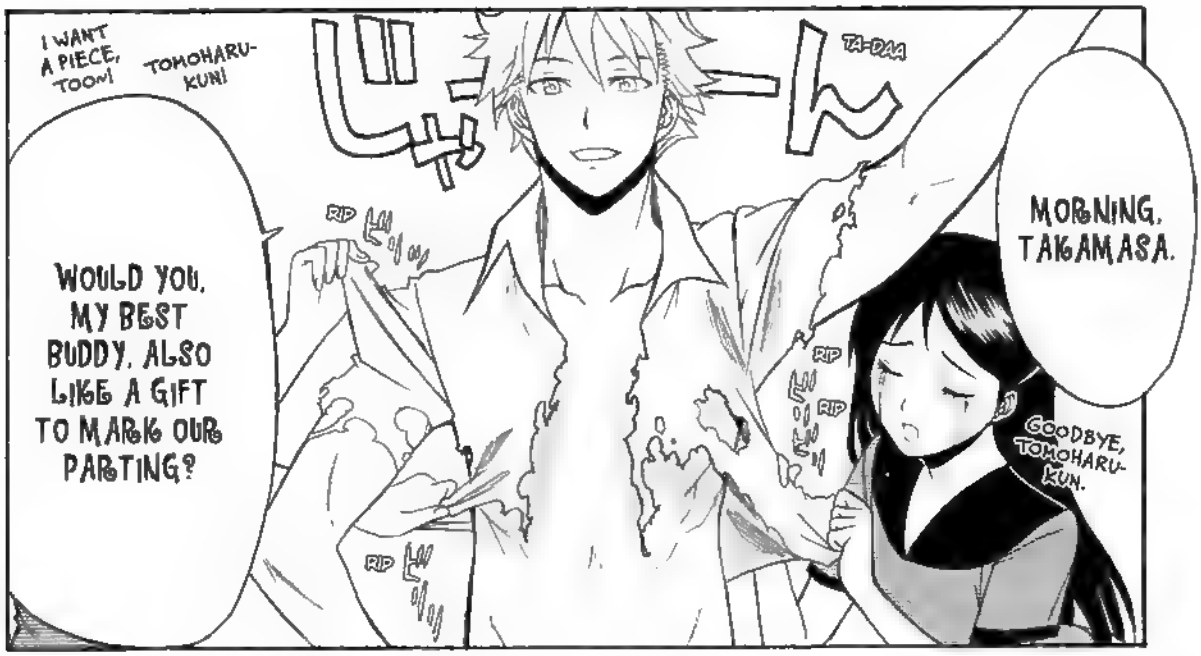

I WANT A PIECE, TOO!
TOMOHARU-KUN!
WOULD YOU, MY BEST BUDDY, ALSO LIKE A GIFT TO MARK OUR PARTING?
RIP
TA-DAA
MORNING, TAKAMASA.
GOODBYE, TOMOHARU-KUN.

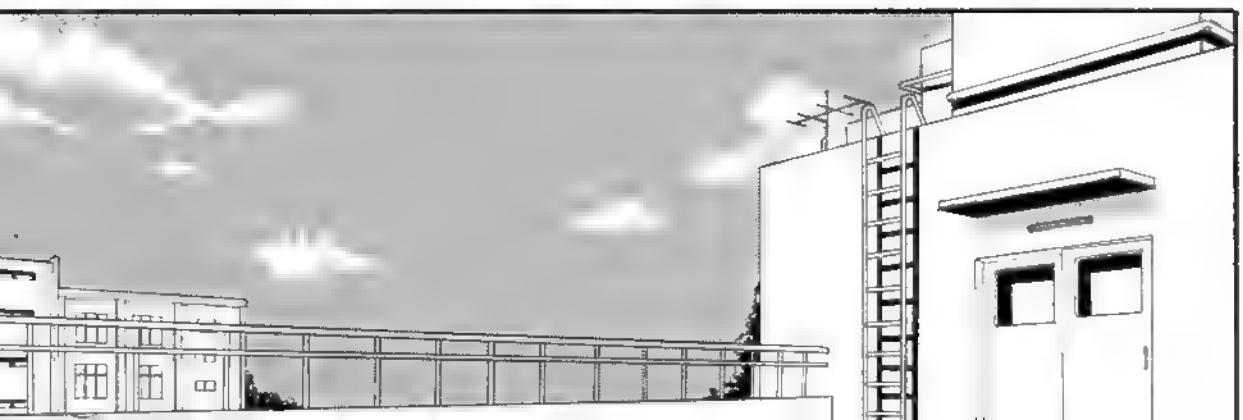
U-FU-FU. WELL, Y'SEE...
THESE LADIES JUST WANT TO GRADUATE WITH SOMETHING TO REMEMBER ME BY.
I DON'T EVEN GET THE SECOND BUTTON...? I'VE BEEN CHEATED
SNIFFLE
THAT..... LOOKS ANNOYING.

TOMOHARU.
MORNING .....

NOBODY WANTS THAT CRAP!!
I EVEN MADE SURE IT WAS STILL DRIPPING WET.
I WANTED TO GIVE HER THE SWIMSUIT I USED IN GYM CLASS .....
HEY, TAKAMASA. WHERE'S ITSUKI-CHAN?
DRIP
DRIP

AH. I'LL DEAL WITH YOU LATER.
OKAY.
?
DID YOU WAKE UP ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE BED?
SQUEEZE
OR WAS IT A FIGHT WITH ITSUKI-CHAN?

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT!!
YOU'RE BREAKING UP?
.....EH. REALLY?



WOW..... SOUNDS ROUGH.
SO THAT KOUGON COLLEGE MAKES YOU DO THAT IF YOU WANNA GET A JOB?
CHANGED CLOTHES
TRAINING ON A MOUNTAIN!?
FOR A WHOLE YEAR?
YEAH.
FOR A "GENPAKU" TO FORMALLY INHERIT HIS HOUSE AND TITLE, THERE ARE TWO REQUIREMENTS .....
SOME-THING LIKE THAT .....
MAS-TERING A SEALED MANDA-LA.
AND BECOMING A CONTRACTING MONK LEADER, OR "PROTECTOR" .....
BUT ITSUKI-CHAN'S GOING TO THE SAME SCHOOL, RIGHT?
SO WHY NOT JUST SHACK UP ON THIS MOUNTAIN TOGETHER?
..... NO.
ITSUKI'S... GOING FOR A DIFFERENT DEGREE.

!!
YOUR DAYS OF FLIRTING WITH HER ARE OVER.
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE SULKING.
AH, GOTCHA.

!?
NOT SO L—
OH, WHATEVER.
LEAVE IT TO YOUR TEACHER OF LOVE HERE.
TREMBLE
TREMBLE

WELL... ACTUALLY, I.....
DON'T TELL ME.
YOU HAVEN'T EVEN CONFESSED YOUR LOVE TO HER?

..... NAH.
IT'S NOT LIKE THAT, TOMOHARU .....

NO MATTER WHAT YOUR ROMANTIC WOES ARE...
POINT
I, WHO GET CALLED "PRINCE ♡"— NOT JUST BY THE GIRLS AT OUR SCHOOL, BUT ALSO THOSE FROM NEIGHBORING ONES, CAN HELP YOU OUT.

I CAN'T .....
THAT'S JUST NOT HOW IT IS.....
HUH?

OBVI-OUSLY ...
..... NO.

ALL I SAID..... IS THAT ITSUKI WAS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE OF MY FATHER'S WHO CAME LOOKING FOR HELP.....
ABOUT ITSUKI BEING A CORPSE PRINCESS... AND ABOUT MY FAMILY .....
...I COULDN'T TELL TOMO-HARU EVERY-THING.

CAN'T WHAT?
YOU THINK YOU GOTTA HOLD BACK JUST BECAUSE ITSUKI-CHAN KNEW YOUR OLD MAN OR WHATEVER?

BECAUSE..... I'M DEFINITELY SCARED.....
BUT..... EVEN SO..... HE'S NOT TOTALLY OFF THE MARK.

ABOUT THE NEAR FUTURE..... AND HOW THE CORPSE PRINCESS RULES MEAN IT'S ALL GONNA END.

ABOUT OUR PATH **FORWARD** AS CORPSE PRINCESS AND CONTRACTING MONK.

AFTER KILLING 108 SHIKABANE ...

...SHE'LL RISE TO HEAVEN.

AT THE END OF THE ROAD, WE'RE GONNA BE SPLIT APART.....

SO..... EVEN IF WE FIGHT IT OUT TOGETHER.....

...WILL I DEAL WITH THAT?

HOW .....

ONCE IT'S TIME TO SAY GOODBYE FOR REAL .....

IF..... I WERE TO CONFESS MY FEELINGS TO ITSUKI NOW.....

UNAWARE
WELL, I DUNNO WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK, BUT...
EVEN IF YOU'VE GOTTA SPLIT UP FOR A LITTLE WHILE...
JUST USE THAT TIME TO THINK ABOUT WAYS TO HAVE FUN ONCE YOU'RE BACK TOGETHER. BE PRAGMATIC ABOUT IT.
HMM.
IT'D BE NICE IF THAT'S HOW I COULD SEE IT .....
BUT IN REALITY, ...
BEING AWAY FROM HER'S NOT GONNA BE FUN AT ALL.
BEFORE THEN.....I REALLY...
...NEED TO KNOW HOW ITSUKI FEELS ABOUT ME.....
?.

KYAHHH!?
JOLT
AHHH!?!?

I-ITSUKI. HOW LONG'VE YOU BEEN .....?

BADUM
BADUM
AH. AHAHA .....
I THOUGHT GRADUATION WAS OVER SO...I BROUGHT YOU YOUR BAG.....
EH.....? WHAT'S WRONG?
BADUM

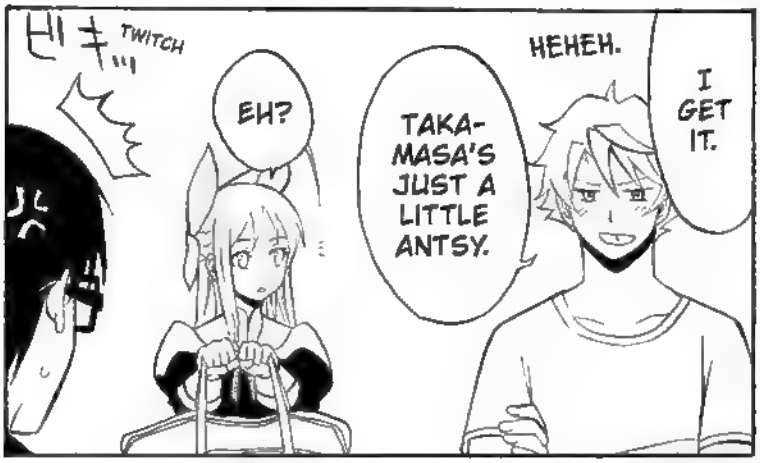
EH?
I..... JUST GOT HERE.

AH. UHMM..... JUST TRAINING TOOLS AND DAILY NECESSITIES FOR TAKAMASA WHILE HE'S AT COLLEGE.
GOTCHA. SO WHAT'S IN THE BAG?
WHAT WAS THAT JUST NOW...?

PHEW !!
MORNING, ITSUKI-CHAN.
WANT THESE UNDERWEAR?
THEY'RE MINE.
UNDERWEAR !?
NO..... THAT'S ALL RIGHT .....
EH!?
CLENCH

TAKAMASA'S MASTER SAYS THE SOONER HE CAN START TRAINING, THE BETTER.....

EH!?
SO HIS JOB TRAINING BEGINS BEFORE HE EVEN STARTS SCHOOL !?
AH. YES.


TWITCH
EH?
TAKA-MASA'S JUST A LITTLE ANTSY.
HEHEH.
I GET IT.

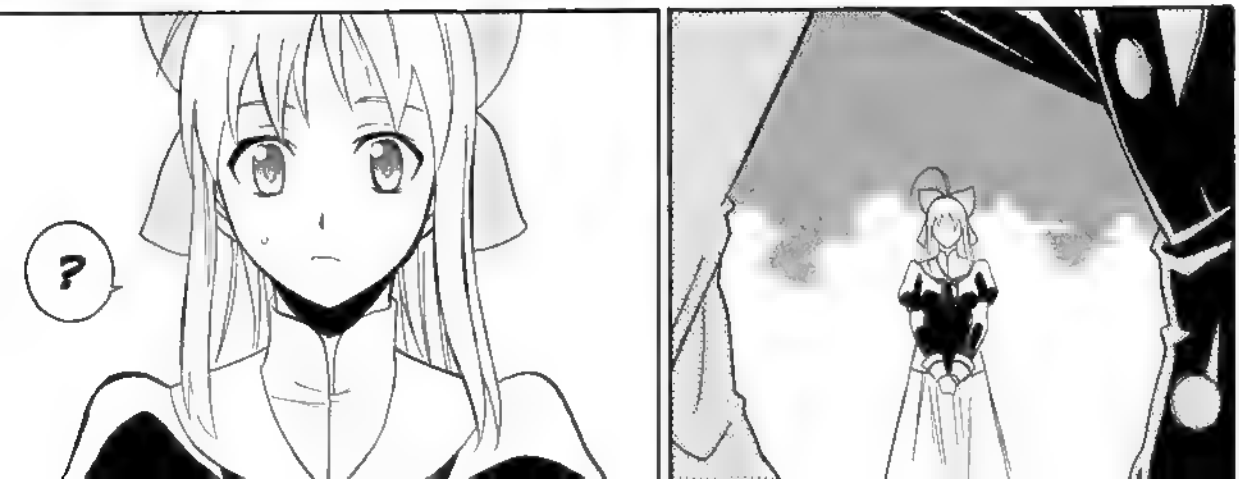
UWAHH!?
SORRY.
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
TOMO-HARU .....

WHAT THE HELL? DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE SPENT TWO YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL TOGETHER AND YOU HAVEN'T EVEN MADE *THE FIRST MOVE!?*
EH?
DAMMIT, TOMOHARU ...!!

WHAT IS IT, TAKA-MASA?
NOTHING AT ALL. JUST HOLD ON A SEC.

OR IS IT THAT ...
...YOU'RE AFRAID OF CONFESSING AND GETTING REJECTED .....?

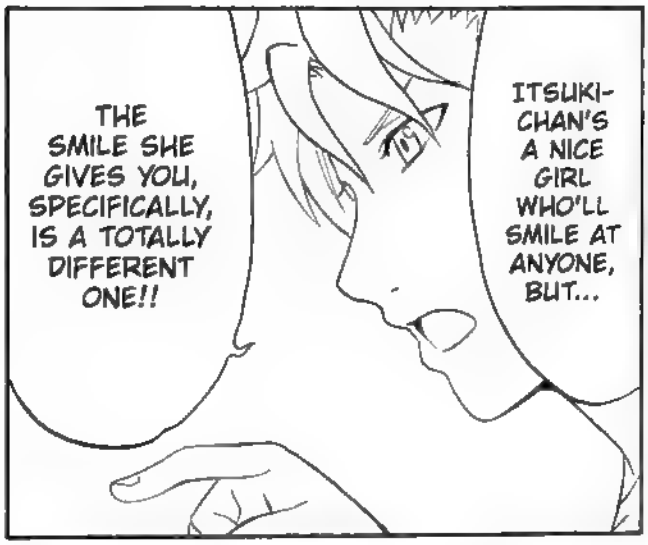
UHH .....


?

...IS THAT REALLY WHAT YOU'RE THINKING?
DON'T BE A MORON.
TWINGE
TWINGE
HEY...

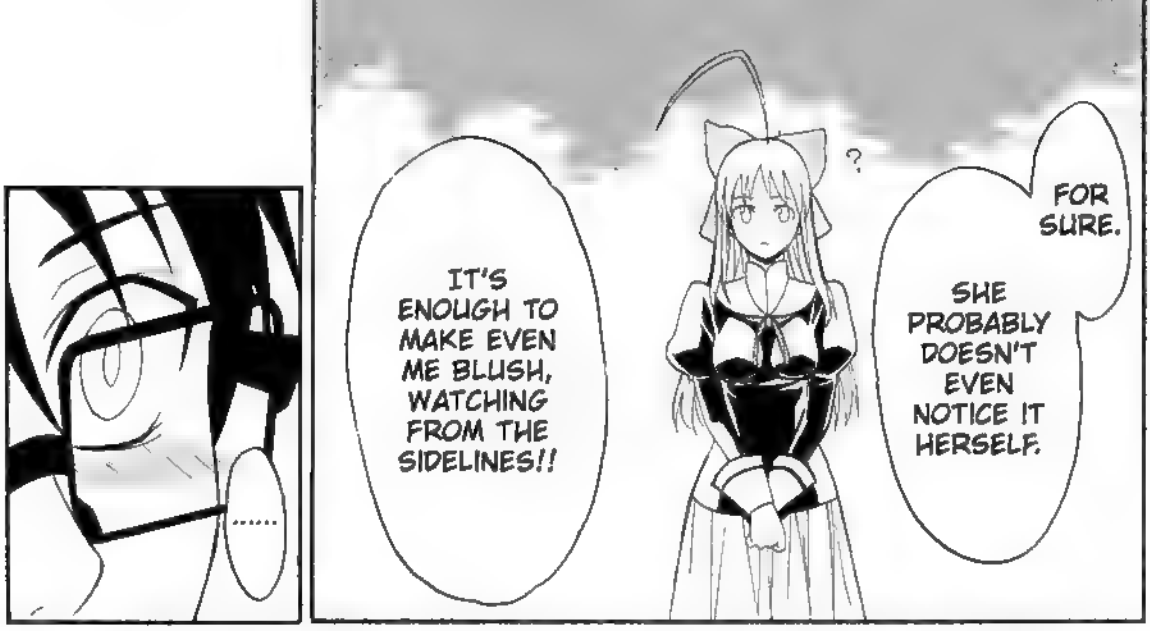
WHAP
OUCH !!!

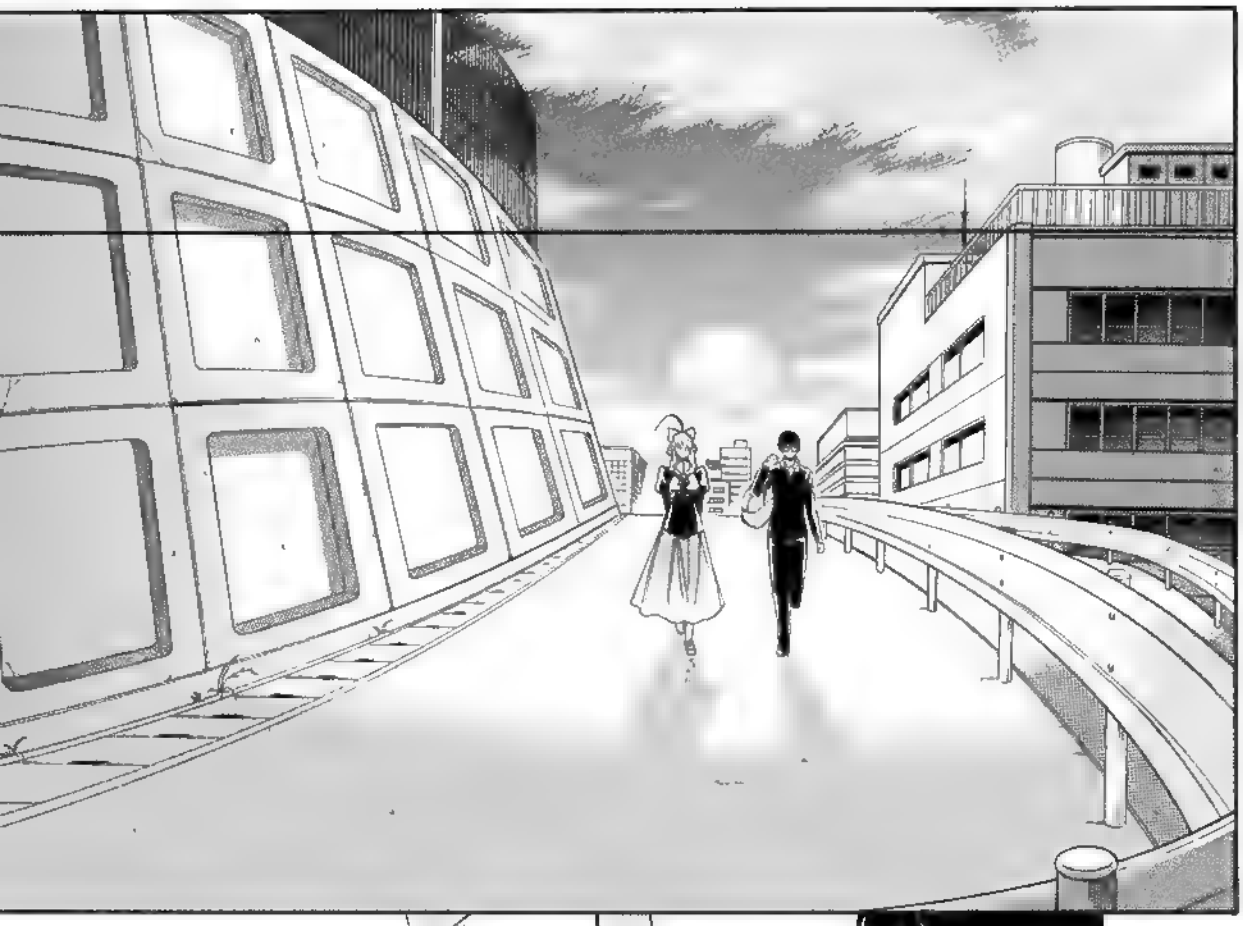
YOU GOT WOOD FOR BRAINS?
MAN, YOU'RE SLOW, TAKA-MASA.
IT'D NEVER HAPPEN !!
TWIRL
TWIRL
WHAT DO YOU MEAN .....?


THE SMILE SHE GIVES YOU, SPECIFICALLY, IS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT ONE!!
ITSUKI-CHAN'S A NICE GIRL WHO'LL SMILE AT ANYONE, BUT...

THAT DIFFERENCE MAKES IT CLEAR ENOUGH.
EH!?
IN HER SMILE.

A DIFFERENT ONE?
!


.....
IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE EVEN ME BLUSH, WATCHING FROM THE SIDELINES!!
?
SHE PROBABLY DOESN'T EVEN NOTICE IT HERSELF.
FOR SURE.



SO BEFORE LEAVING, I SAID GOODBYE TO EVERYONE, AND THEY STARTED CRYING...IT WAS AN AMAZING MOMENT.
.....HER SMILE.

WHAT WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT EARLIER?
HUH!? HA-HA-HA.
THAT WAS JUST A LECTURE FROM TEACHER TOMOHARU .....
?
..... MHM.
HEY, TAKA-MASA.
THAT GUY..... SAYING HIS PIECE AND THEN BOLTING .....
STEP
STEP
YOU'VE GOTTA FIND THE WAY FORWARD YOURSELF!!
HA- HA- HA- HA- HA- HA- HA- HA- HA.
THAT'S ALL I'VE GOT TO SAY.
STEP
STEP
STEP
..... BUT...
I WONDER..... DOES ITSUKI REALLY LIKE ME.....?
GLANCE チラ
... HMM.

.....WHAT THE HECK WAS I EVEN WORRIED ABOUT?
YEAH ...
OF COURSE.
I KNOW YOU'LL PASS YOUR PROTECTOR TRAINING AND COME HOME.
I..... BELIEVE IN YOU...

IT'S CLEAR SHE REALLY CARES ABOUT ME, SO..... THAT'S ENOUGH.

WHETHER OR NOT ITSUKI LIKES ME? THAT'S NO BIG DEAL.

ONCE YOU FINISH YOUR TRAINING AND COME HOME...

...THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO TELL YOU.

MHM.

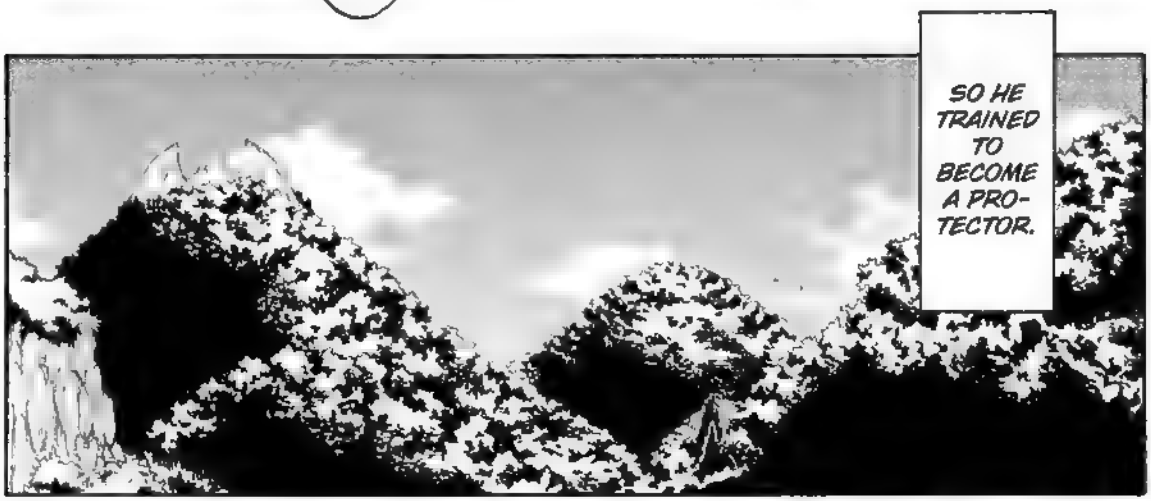
.....YEAH?

ACTUALLY..... ME TOO.

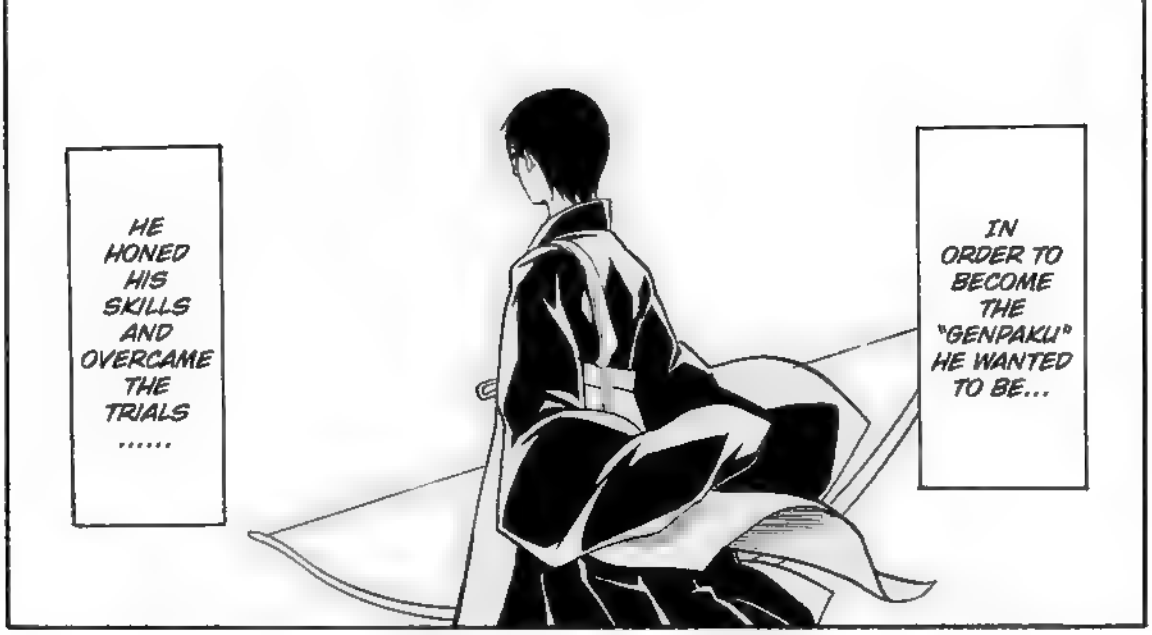
!

ONCE YOU FINISH YOUR TRAINING AND COME HOME...
...THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO TELL YOU.
MHM.
.....YEAH?
ACTUALLY..... ME TOO.
!

I'LL BE BACK.
YEAH.


SO HE TRAINED TO BECOME A PRO-TECTOR.

PROTEC-TORS ARE ENTRUSTED WITH ALL THE CON-TRACTING MONKS IN A GIVEN REGION.
SO HIS TRAINING WAS BEYOND HARSH, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY .....


HE HONED HIS SKILLS AND OVERCAME THE TRIALS .....
IN ORDER TO BECOME THE "GENPAKU" HE WANTED TO BE...

STOP IT, TAKAMASA.
HOW-EVER ...

I THOUGHT I'D ALREADY EXPLAINED THIS.
..... STOP WHAT, SENSEI?
THE MASTER REACTED WITH A STERNNESS IN HIS VOICE THAT THE BOY HAD NEVER HEARD BEFORE.
WHEN HE CONFESSED THOSE JOYOUS FEELINGS IN HIS HEART TO HIS MASTER .....

YOU CAN'T THINK OF ITSUKI AS HUMAN AND TREAT HER AS SUCH.
SO STOP IT.

CORPSE PRIN-CESSES AREN'T LIKE HUMANS.
CRACK
THEY'RE "ABERRA-TIONS."

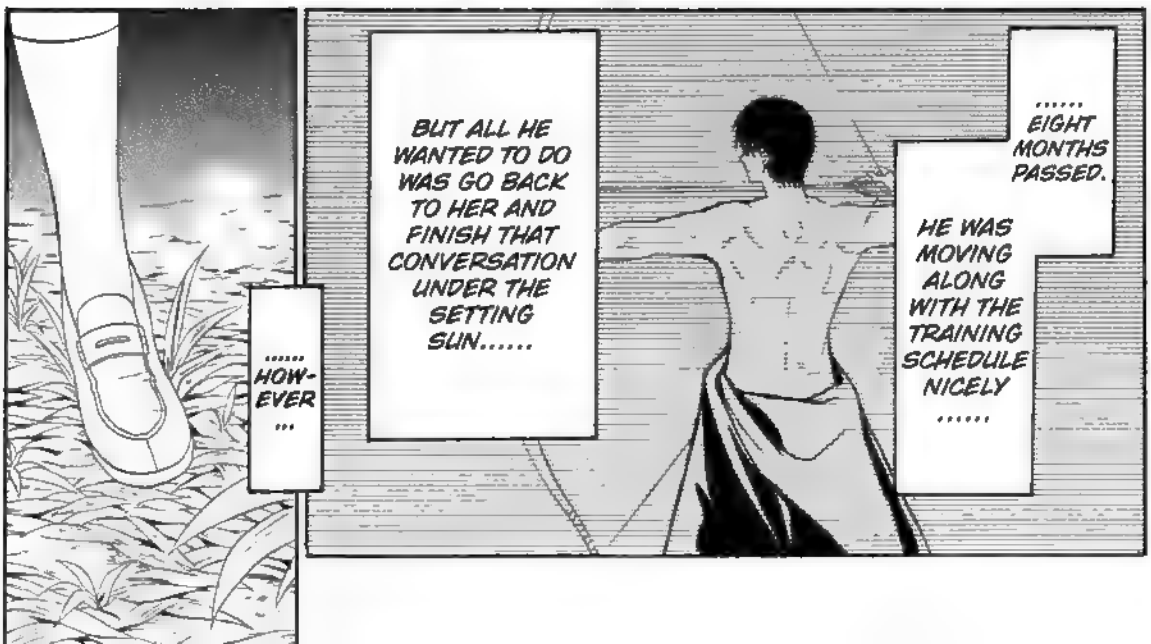
.....
CAN YOU TELL ME WHY?
.....

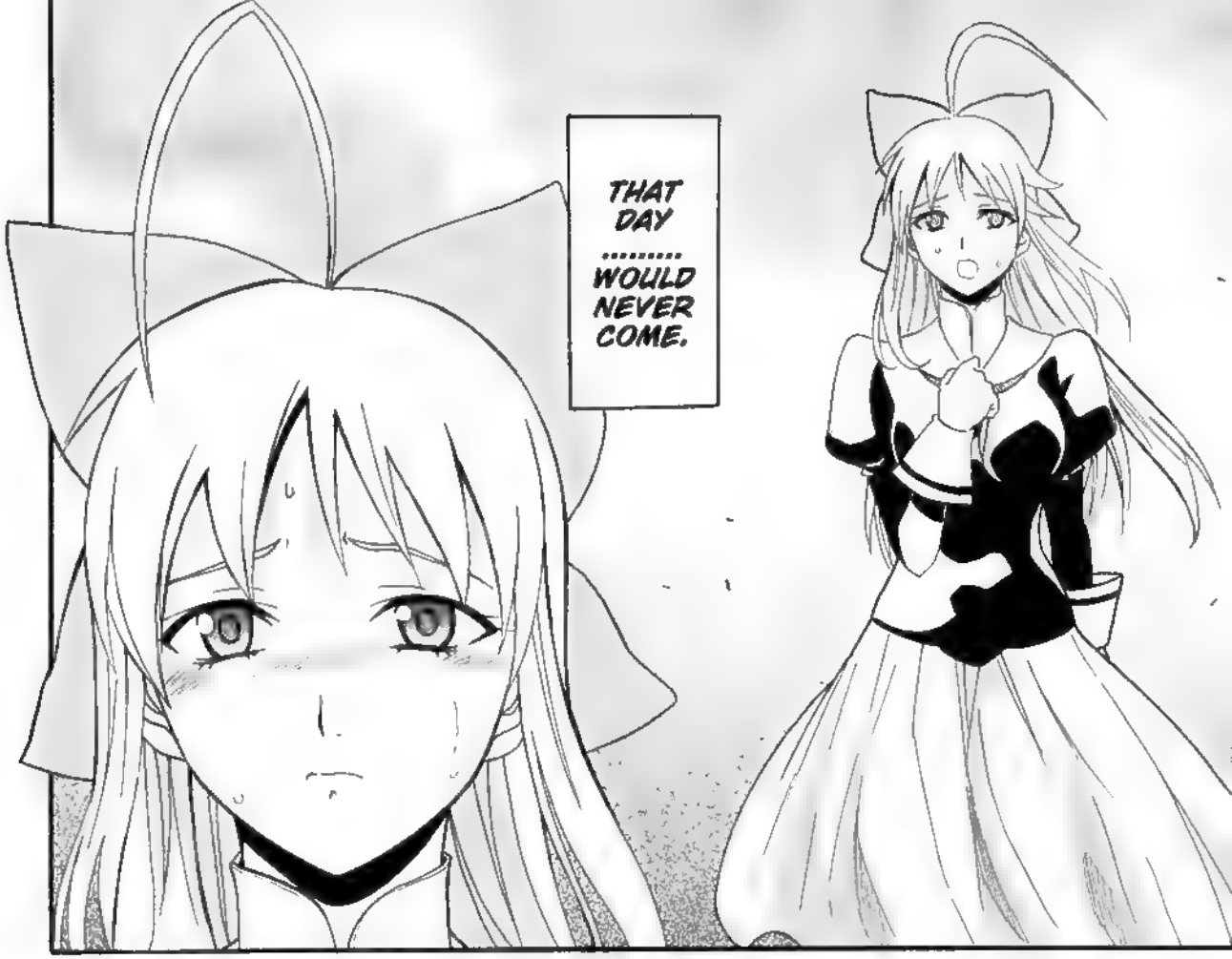
THEY ONLY EXIST THANKS TO THEIR REGRETS AND CONVICTIONS, WHICH SETS THEM APART FROM THE TRUTH AND JUSTICE OF OUR WORLD.
SMASH
YES.
ABERRA-TIONS?

ANY CONTRACTING MONK WHO CAN'T GET THAT STRAIGHT IS DOOMED TO DIE IN BATTLE.....!
THEY MAY LOOK, WALK, AND TALK LIKE PEOPLE, BUT..... NONE OF IT IS REAL.

.....
I'M AFRAID..... I CAN'T ACCEPT THAT.
BECAUSE... WHATEVER YOU'RE SAYING HER TRUE NATURE IS..... ITSUKI STILL COMES OFF AS HUMAN TO ME, SENSEI.
..... TAKA-MASA.

IN THE END ...
ALTHOUGH HE UN-DERSTOOD WHAT HIS MASTER WAS SAY-ING...
...HE STILL..... COULDN'T QUITE ACCEPT IT.....

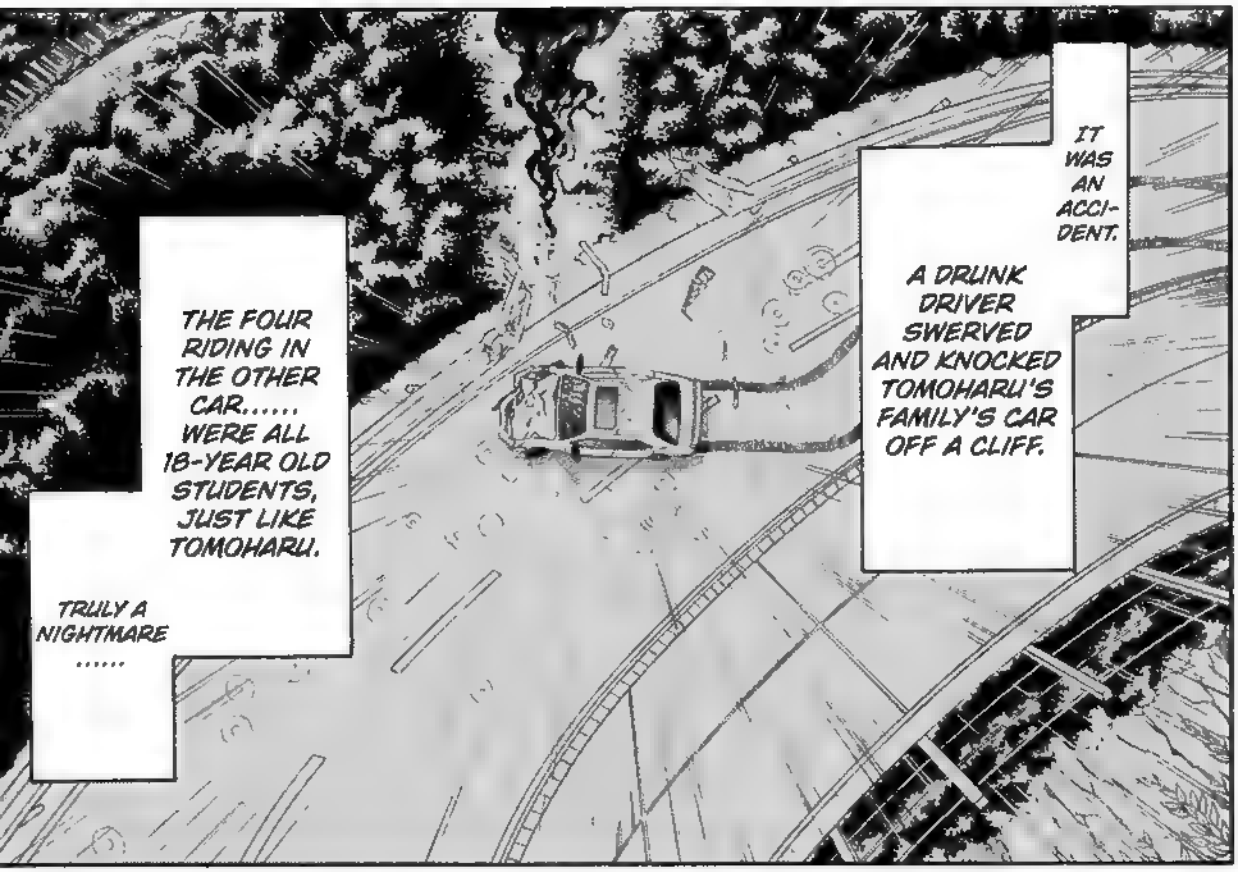

..... EIGHT MONTHS PASSED.
HE WAS MOVING ALONG WITH THE TRAINING SCHEDULE NICELY .....
BUT ALL HE WANTED TO DO WAS GO BACK TO HER AND FINISH THAT CONVERSATION UNDER THE SETTING SUN.....
..... HOW-EVER ...

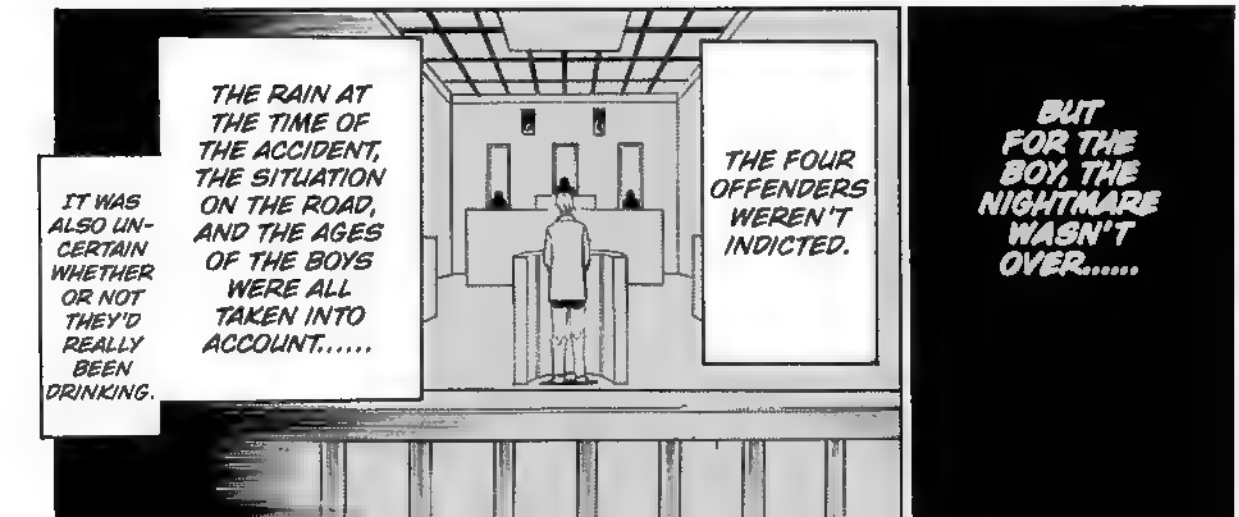

THAT DAY ..... WOULD NEVER COME.

... ITSUKI ?
WHY'RE YOU HERE?

I'M ... I'M SORRY... TAKA-MASA .....
I.....

一家死亡
FAMILY SLAIN
TOMOHARU
KISHIBE-SAN (18)
岸辺 駆春さん(18)


IT WAS AN ACCI-DENT.
A DRUNK DRIVER SWERVED AND KNOCKED TOMOHARU'S FAMILY'S CAR OFF A CLIFF.
THE FOUR RIDING IN THE OTHER CAR..... WERE ALL 18-YEAR OLD STUDENTS, JUST LIKE TOMOHARU.
TRULY A NIGHTMARE .....


IT WAS ALSO UN-CERTAIN WHETHER OR NOT THEY'D REALLY BEEN DRINKING.
THE RAIN AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT, THE SITUATION ON THE ROAD, AND THE AGES OF THE BOYS WERE ALL TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT.....
THE FOUR OFFENDERS WEREN'T INDICTED.
BUT FOR THE BOY, THE NIGHTMARE WASN'T OVER.....

FAMILY GRAVE
.....
TAKA-
MASA.

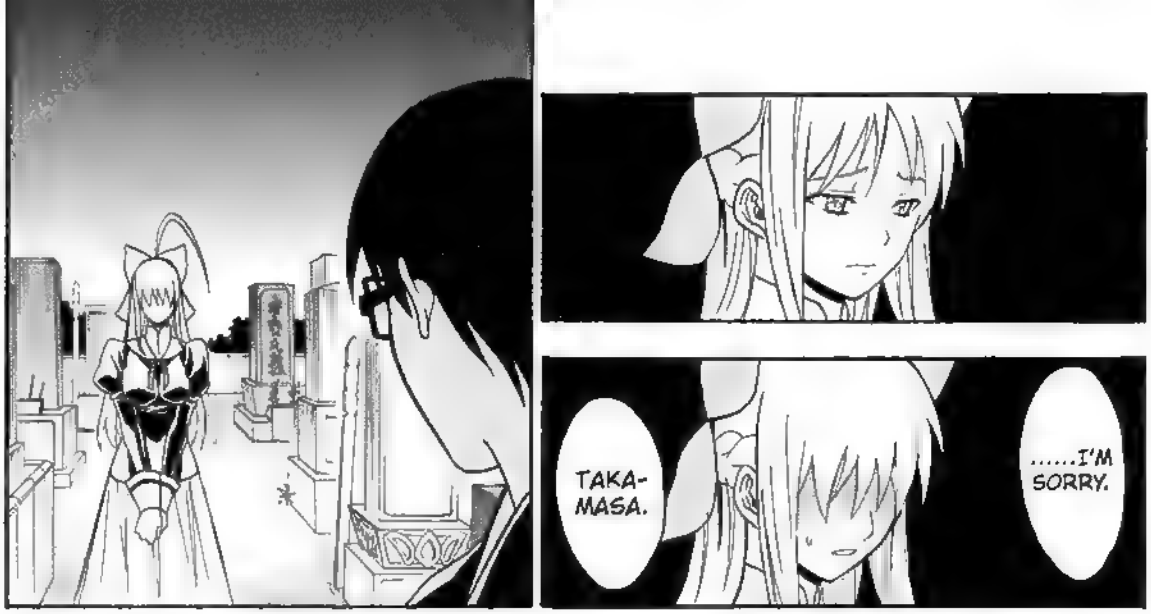
.....
YEAH.

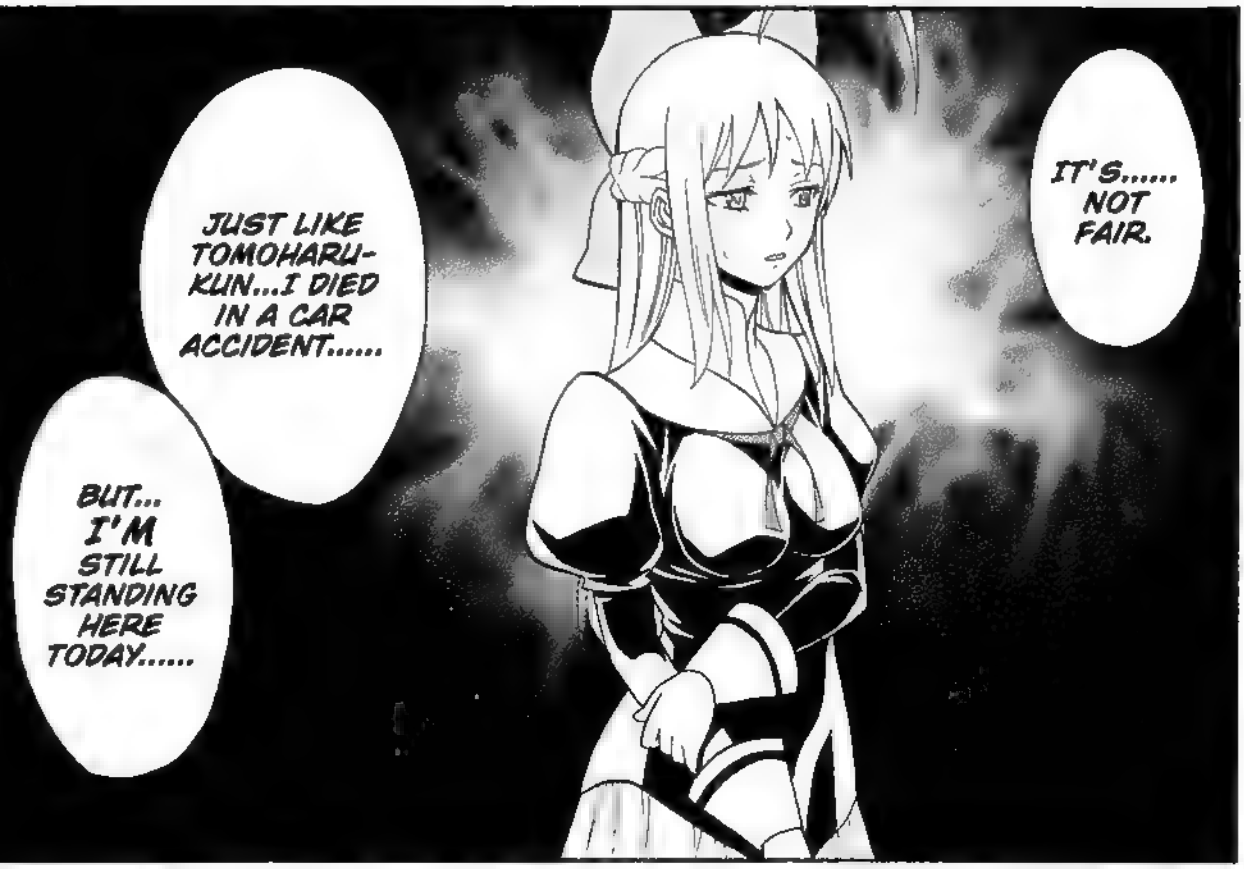
.....
ARE
YOU
OKAY
?

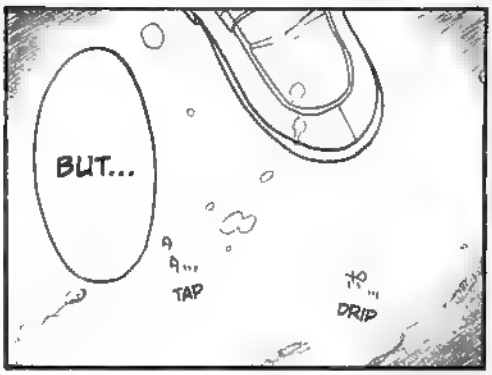
...

TOMO-
HARU.....
IS DEAD.
HE...
CAN'T
COME
BACK TO
LIFE.

!!
.....I
MEAN
...
I
KNOW IT
WOULDN'T
HELP...
.....
STILL
...
EVEN IF
I DIDN'T
AGREE
WITH IT...
EVEN...
IF THEY
WERE
PUNISHED
FOR
THIS...


TAKA-MASA.
.....I'M SORRY.


IT'S..... NOT FAIR.
JUST LIKE TOMOHARU-KUN...I DIED IN A CAR ACCIDENT.....
BUT... I'M STILL STANDING HERE TODAY.....


BUT...
A A... TAP
DRIP

.....YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG.
..... YEAH, BUT...

IT'S LIKE I JUST DON'T GET IT ANYMORE.
THIS WHOLE BEING A CORPSE PRINCESS THING.
ME, AND TOMOHARU-KUN..... AND ANYONE, REALLY— WE ALL WANT TO LIVE.
SO WHAT MADE ME DIFFERENT FROM EVERYONE ELSE.....?
.....
THAT WALL. THAT BORDER BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.....
THEIR FEELINGS FOR EACH OTHER WERE SEPARATED BY IT.
BOTH WERE ONCE MORE MADE PAINFULLY AWARE OF THAT DISTINC-TION.....

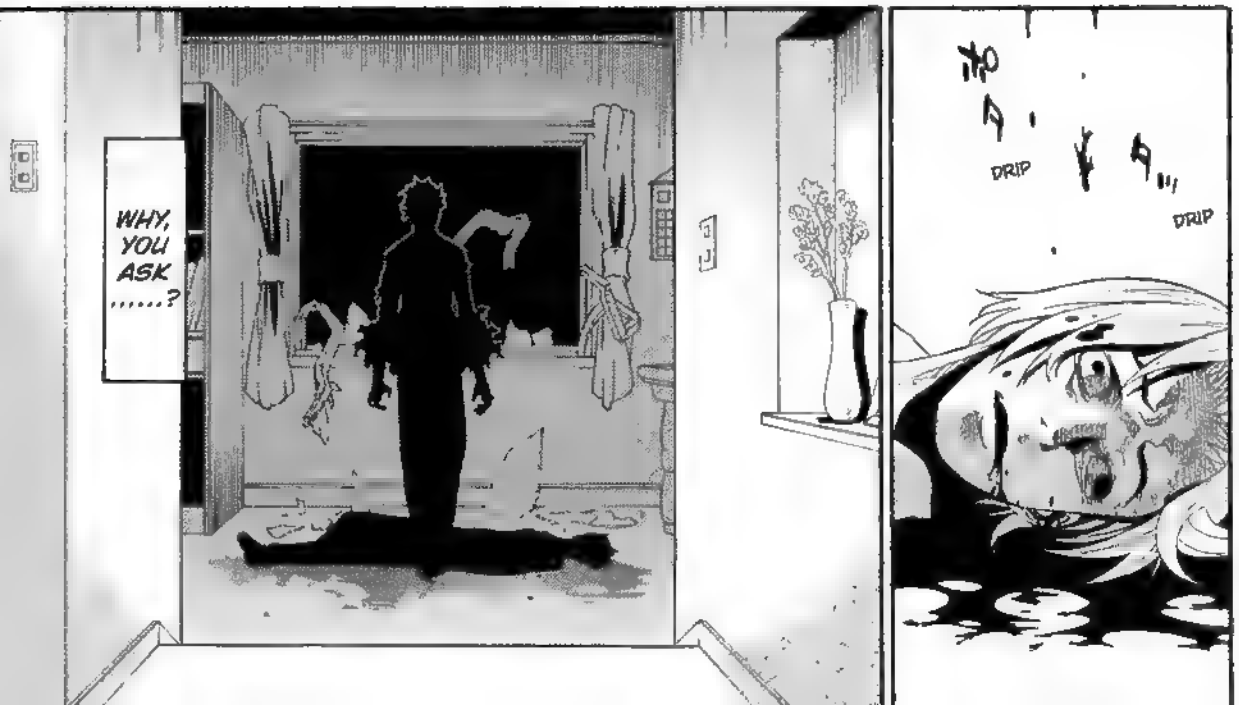
BUT...STILL!
STILL, THE NIGHTMARE WASN'T OVER!!

YES..... BROTHER.
KILLED?
!!
TWO OF THE YOUTHS RIDING IN THE *OFFENDING VEHICLE* HAVE SINCE EXPERIENCED VIOLENT DEATHS.
VIOLENT ... DEATHS ?
WE DETERMINED THAT THE CULPRIT IS A SHIKABANE..... WE'RE DISPATCHING A CORPSE PRINCESS.
SLAP
AND YESTERDAY MORNING..... *A THIRD WAS DISCOVERED.* THAT'S WHEN.....
YES.

HE VOLUNTEERED TO HUNT DOWN THE SHIKABANE, SO THE TWO HEADED OUT FOR THE MISSION.
...
.....
TAKA-MASA.

SNAP

STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
WHY ?
BAM


WHY, YOU ASK .....?
DRIP
DRIP

IT CAN'T BE.....NO.

ACTUALLY.....I KNEW IT WOULD BE.

OF ALL THINGS..... MY FRIEND WOUND UP A SHIKABANE.....!!

CLANG
!!?
.....
CRACK
FIGHT!?
JOLT
FIGHT!!!
GET UP!
TAKA-MASA!!

FIGHT MY FRIEND!?

ITSUKI'S GONNA..... KILL TOMOHARU .....!!
SHE'S GONNA KILL HIM!?
Corpse Princess 8 End

CORPSE PRINCESS PRODUCTION HELPERS:

OOSUMI-SAN
KATOU-SAN
YOSHIOKA-SAN
TSUJI-SAN

EMERGENCY HELPERS:

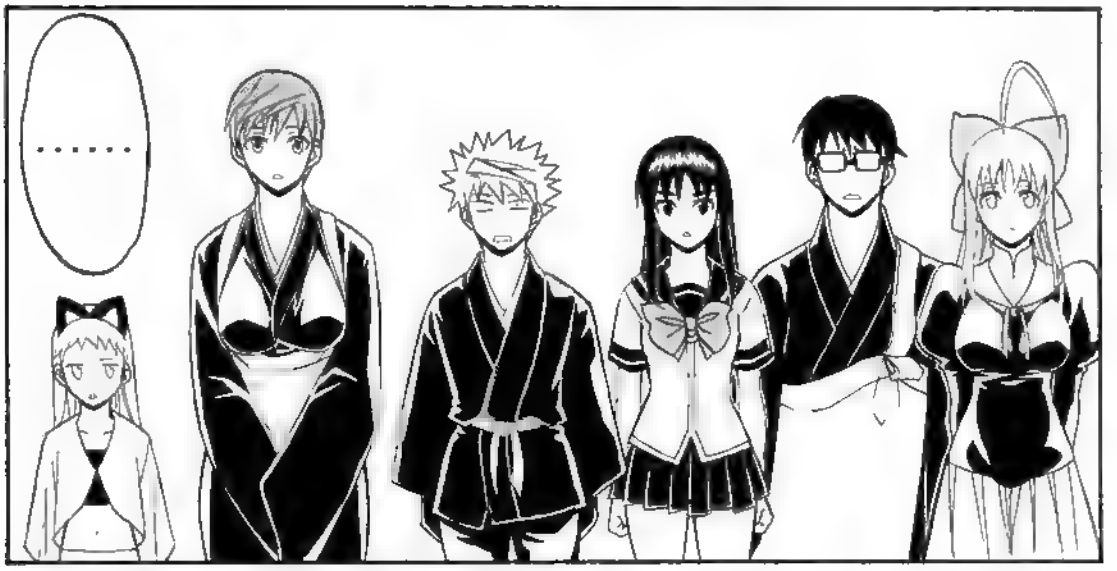
YAMAUCHI-SAN
USAMI-SAN
NIJOU-DON

SUPERVISOR:

SHIMIZU

AND THANKS TO ALL THE READERS OUT THERE!

BONUS: THE DAI-SOUJOU'S WHIMSICAL YOUTH MINGLING PROGRAM



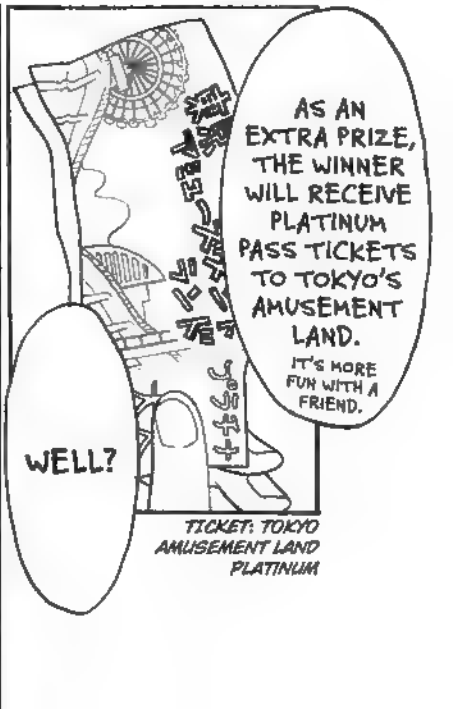
AND HONING ONE'S BONDS IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT FOR ANY GOOD CONTRACTING MONK.
THERE WAS NO ONE ELSE TO INVITE .....!
...BUT WHAT IS THAT?
AND WHY US?

ぺかー?
SPARKLE
AND THAT PRIZE IS THIS.
TADA!! A GREAT AND ANCIENT, "SUPER SECRET TREASURE SCROLL" SUTRA!!!

YEAH... BUT...
THE COURSE IS THREE LAPS AROUND A 2 KM MOUNTAIN PATH.
THE WINNING TEAM EVEN GETS A PRIZE.

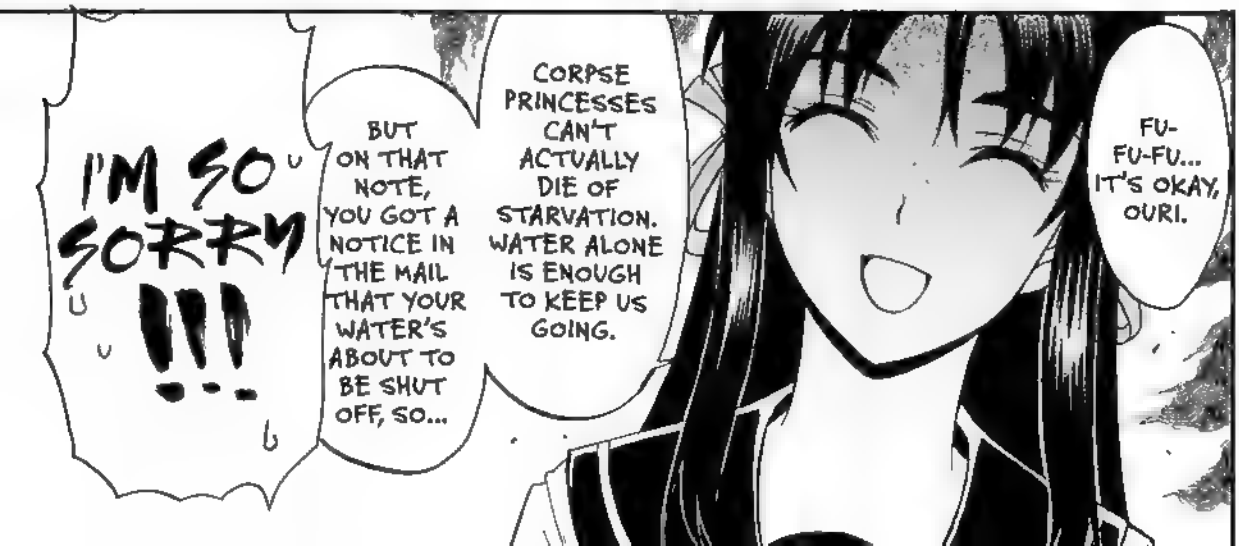
WH-WHO'D WANT THAT !!?
OH? YOUR EXPRESSION CLEARLY TELLS ME YOU HAVE NO INTEREST IN THE PRIZE, OURI.
FU-FU-FU... BUT THIS SUTRA IS A RANK-A RITUAL TOOL WITH A MARKET VALUE OF TEN MILLION YEN.

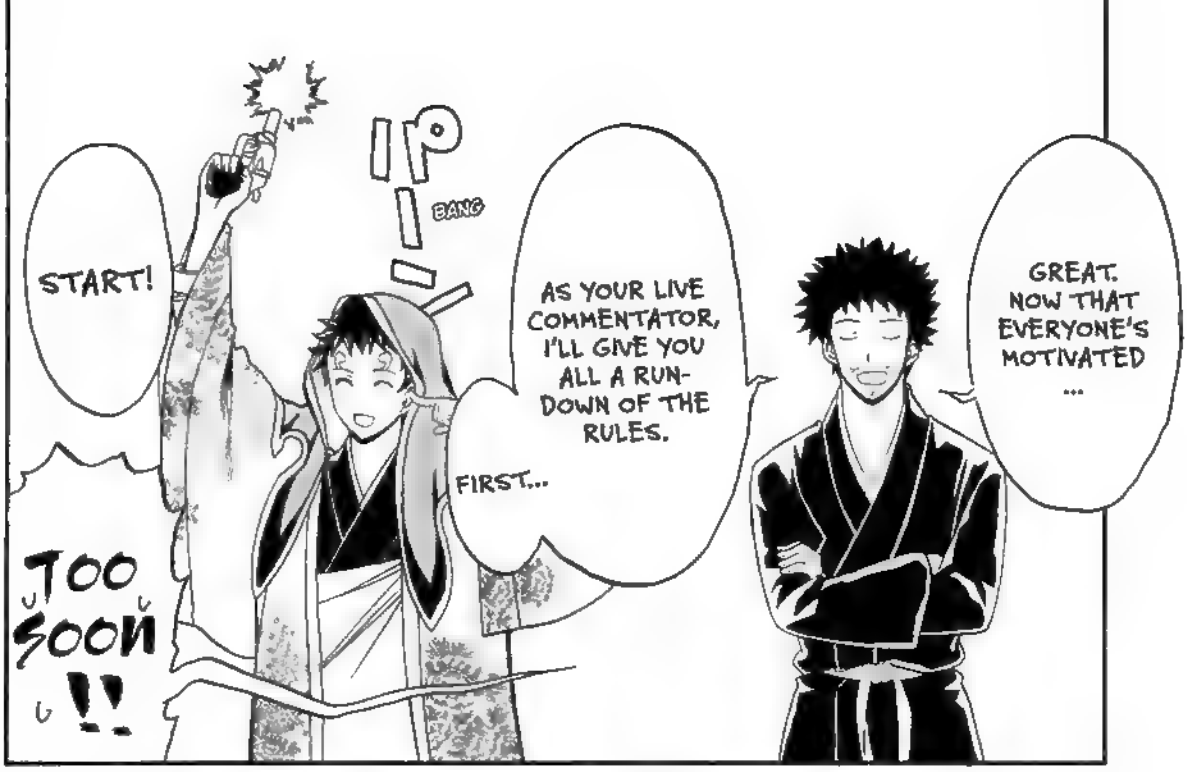
AHH... NAH.
I DON'T REALLY NEED THE SUTRA OR THE TICKETS ...
PLATINUM PASSES...
A RANK-A SUTRA.
MONEYWISE, AS LONG AS I'VE GOT ENOUGH TO LIVE ON...
DAZED
もぁ
DAZED
もぁ


AS AN EXTRA PRIZE, THE WINNER WILL RECEIVE PLATINUM PASS TICKETS TO TOKYO'S AMUSEMENT LAND.
IT'S MORE FUN WITH A FRIEND.
WELL?
TICKET: TOKYO AMUSEMENT LAND PLATINUM

A CONTRACTING MONK'S RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING FOR A CORPSE PRINCESS'S NEEDS OUTSIDE OF BATTLE, TOO.
IN OTHER WORDS... YOU'VE GOTTA GIVE YOUR CORPSE PRINCESS SOME MONEY STRAIGHT OUT OF YOUR OWN MONK SALARY...
!?
EH?
OHHH... YOU SURE ABOUT THAT, OURI?
LET ME TELL YOU ONE OF THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF BEING A CONTRACTING MONK.

RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
H-HOSHI-MURA-SAAAN!!!!
GRUMBLE
GROWWWWWL
SERIOUSLY...? BUT IT'S ALREADY BEEN TWO WHOLE MONTHS SINCE I TOOK THIS JOB... WHICH MEANS...
BADUM
BADUM


I'M SO SORRY!!!
BUT ON THAT NOTE, YOU GOT A NOTICE IN THE MAIL THAT YOUR WATER'S ABOUT TO BE SHUT OFF, SO...
CORPSE PRINCESSES CAN'T ACTUALLY DIE OF STARVATION. WATER ALONE IS ENOUGH TO KEEP US GOING.
FU-FU-FU... IT'S OKAY, OURI.


GREAT. NOW THAT EVERYONE'S MOTIVATED ...
AS YOUR LIVE COMMENTATOR, I'LL GIVE YOU ALL A RUN-DOWN OF THE RULES.
FIRST...
BANG
START!
TOO SOON !!

WE'RE NOT READY, DAI-SOUJOU!! I'M NOT DONE EXPLAINING THINGS!!
AHH... RIGHT.
I KNEW THAT.
IF YOU KNOW, THEN CUT IT OUT!!
IT'S FINE. I HAVE THE SPECIAL ALL-SEEING "CREATION'S CYCLE" EYE. SO I KNOW ALL, UMEHARA.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE A PRETTY IMPORTANT PLOT POINT!!
SAVE THAT CRAP FOR THE ACTUAL STORY!!
WAIT. AM I THE STRAIGHT MAN IN THIS COMEDY DUO?

GAH. WHATEVER !!
EVERYONE, TO YOUR MARKS!!

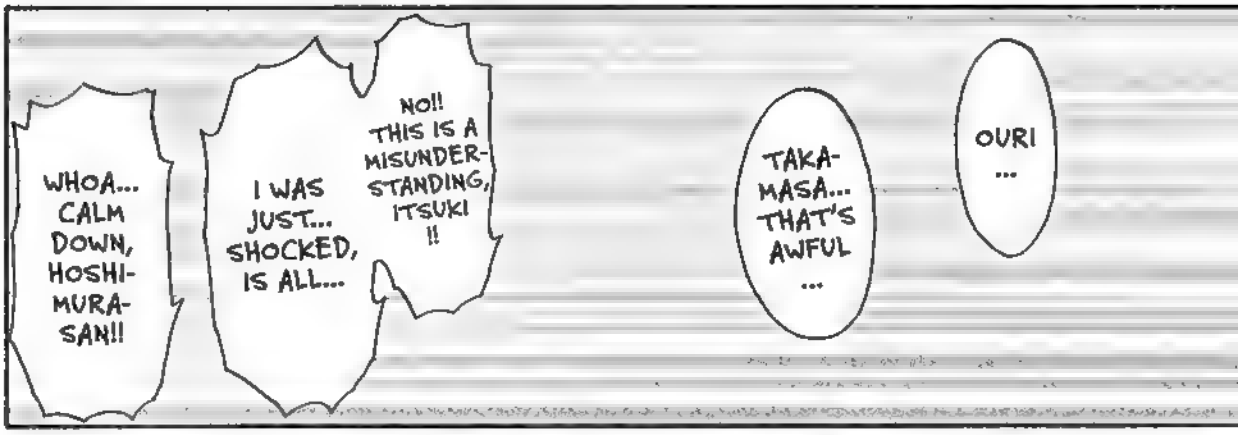
SHIRTS, RIGHT TO LEFT: MAKINA, RIKA, ITSUKI, SAKI

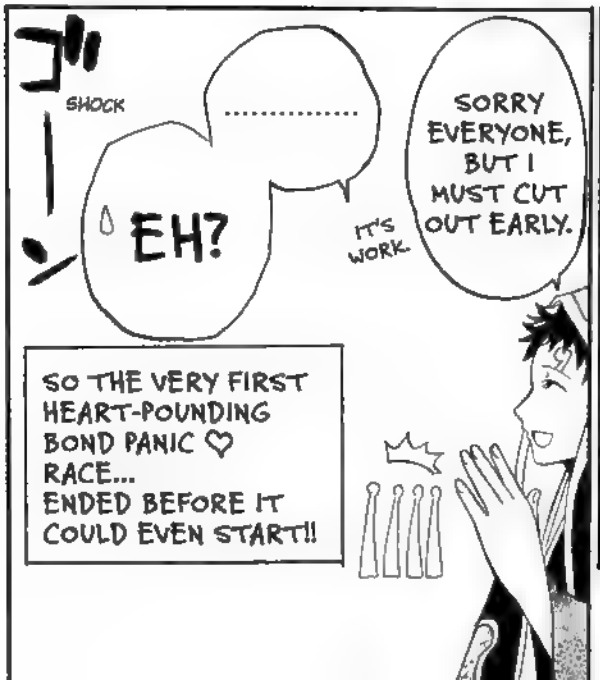
IDIOT!! YOU'RE THE SHINING STAR OF THIS GROUP, RIKA!!
IS THAT ANY WAY FOR A MONK TO SPEAK?
UMM ...
AGE-WISE, I'M A LITTLE... THIS IS EMBARRASSING ...
YOU DEGENERATE ...
GLARE
DON'T YOU GET IT?

LEMME EXPLAIN THE RULES.
EACH PAIR WILL BIND TWO OF THEIR LEGS, THREE-LEGGED RACE STYLE.
THEN YOU'LL TRY TO RUN AFTER WEDGING THIS BULGING WATER BALLOON BETWEEN YOURSELVES.
BLUB
HEY!!
ARE WE ON A VARIETY SHOW OR WHAT!?
BY THE WAY, THE WATER'S FILLED WITH CHILI POWDER.
WHAT THE HECK!!?
BY OVERCOMING THIS TRIAL, YOUR BONDS WILL DEEPEN FURTHER...
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DAI-SOUJOU?
...
SMILE
YES, INDEED.
WHAT WAS THAT PAUSE ABOUT !?
BE STRAIGHT WITH US, DAI-SOUJOU !!

HEEHE
EHEE.
FU-FU-FU... WE'RE NOT BREAKING ANY RULES.
OUR LEGS ARE TIED.
ALSO, THERE'S ANOTHER GOOD REASON TO DO IT LIKE THIS.
EH?
REALLY?
HUH!?
YOU'RE TOTALLY CHEATING !!
THAT LOOKS WAY TOO EASY.
FU FU ...
IF YOU'RE THAT PESSIMISTIC FROM THE START, YOU'VE GOT NO SHOT AT WINNING, OURI.
HYAHH !!
WHY!?
WHOA !?
FWIP
THIS!
TWITCH
STIFFEN

.....
THAT'S NOT ALL!! IT'LL EVEN THREATEN THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CORPSE PRINCESS PARTNERS!!
THESE BOOBS'LL STOP THE BOYS IN THEIR TRACKS RIGHT BEFORE THE FINISH LINE. THAT'S THE REAL REASON FOR THIS STANCE...
HEH HEH... YES, PERFECT ...
SOB SOB ...


OURI ...
TAKA-MASA... THAT'S AWFUL ...
NO!! THIS IS A MISUNDER-STANDING, ITSUKI !!
I WAS JUST... SHOCKED, IS ALL...
WHOA... CALM DOWN, HOSHI-MURA-SAN!!


SHOCK
EH?
.....
SORRY EVERYONE, BUT I MUST CUT OUT EARLY.
IT'S WORK.
SO THE VERY FIRST HEART-POUNDING BOND PANIC ♡ RACE... ENDED BEFORE IT COULD EVEN START!!

...AH. MM-HM.
I SEE... I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

RINNNG
GWAHHH.
!! !?
GWAHHH!!
! ...
WAHHH.

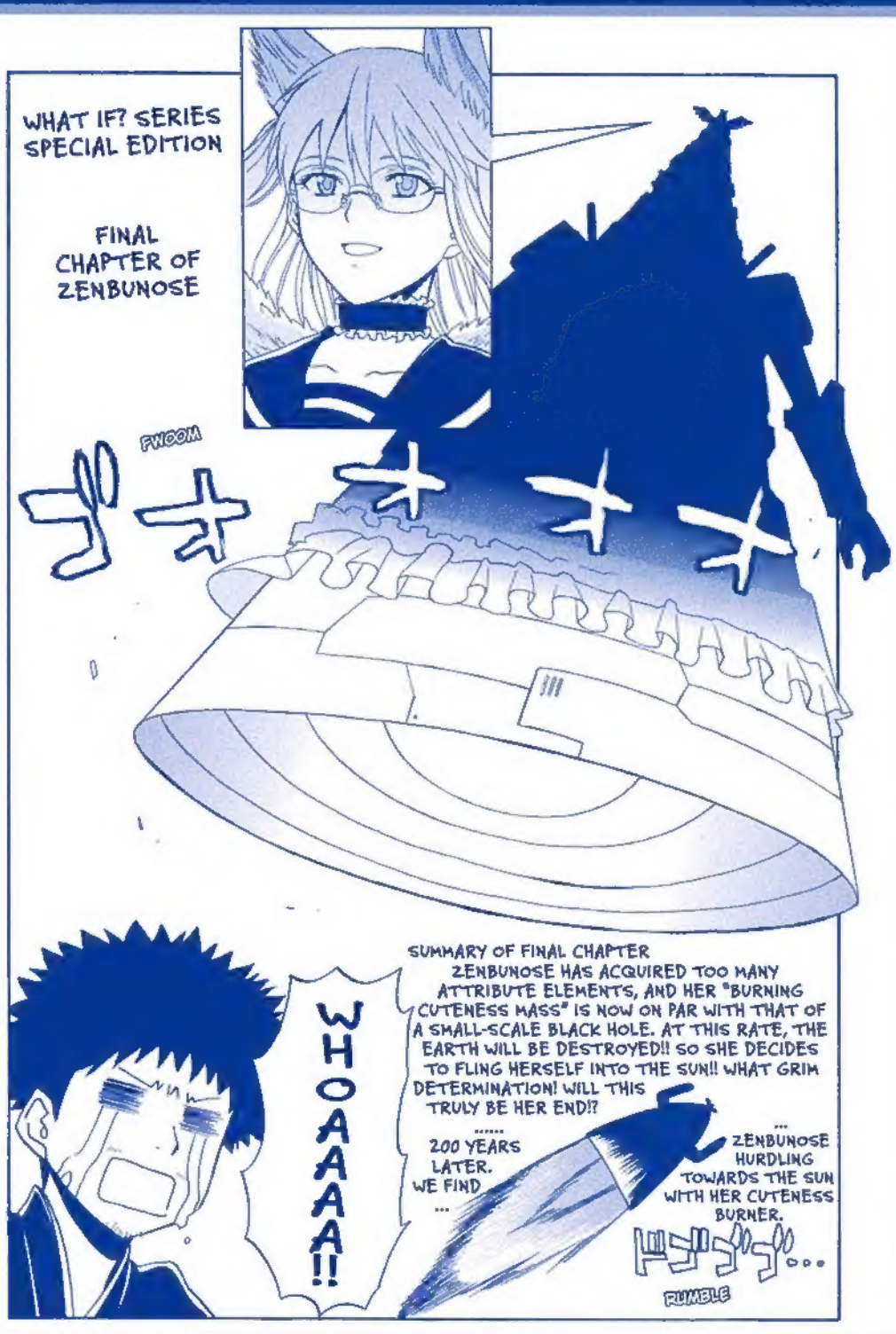
"SHE'S GONNA KILL HIM!? ITSUKI'S GONNA..... KILL TOMOHARU!!" SO SAYS TAKAMASA SOUGI. HIS FRIEND IS A SHIKABANE, AND HIS CRUSH IS A CORPSE PRINCESS. SUCH IS HIS CRUEL REALITY. SO NOW, "DEATH" FACES OFF AGAINST "ABERRATION." WHAT MUST CONTRACTING MONK OURI THINK AFTER HEARING THE END OF THIS TRAGIC TALE? WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR HIM AND HIS CORPSE PRINCESS, MAKINA?

9

SHIKABANE KILLS NEEDED FOR CORPSE PRINCESS MAKINA HOSHIMURA TO ASCEND TO HEAVEN: 92

volume COMING SOON

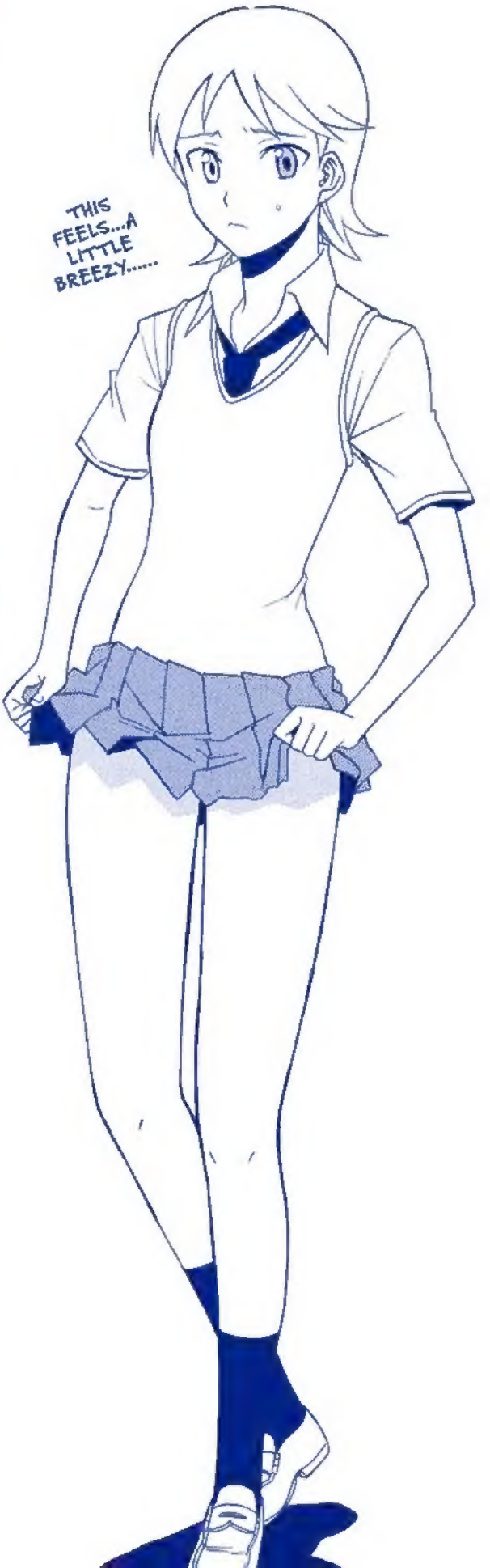
CORPSE PRINCESS


WHAT IF? SERIES SPECIAL EDITION
FINAL CHAPTER OF ZENBUNOSE
FWOOM
SUMMARY OF FINAL CHAPTER
ZENBUNOSE HAS ACQUIRED TOO MANY ATTRIBUTE ELEMENTS, AND HER "BURNING CUTENESS MASS" IS NOW ON PAR WITH THAT OF A SMALL-SCALE BLACK HOLE. AT THIS RATE, THE EARTH WILL BE DESTROYED!! SO SHE DECIDES TO FLING HERSELF INTO THE SUN!! WHAT GRIM DETERMINATION! WILL THIS TRULY BE HER END!?
WHOAAAA!!
200 YEARS LATER. WE FIND ...
... ZENBUNOSE HURDLING TOWARDS THE SUN WITH HER CUTENESS BURNER.
RUMBLE

AKAHITO YOSHIICHI

RINSEN SHIRAE (DAI-SOUZU)
HEIGHT: 162 CM
WEIGHT: 55 KG
BLOOD TYPE: A
BIRTHDAY: APRIL 20TH
AGE: 17
FAVORITE THINGS: ANCHOVIES, BIKING AT NIGHT
LEAST FAVORITE THINGS: TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE'S LOVE LIVES
SPECIAL ABILITIES: KEEPING THINGS TIDY AND ORDERED (GREAT AT FIGURING OUT STORAGE)

※FOR A WHILE AFTER SHIRAE HAD HIS DEBUT, I WAS STILL QUESTIONING WHETHER TO MAKE HIM A BOY OR A GIRL. THE MATTER'S DECIDED NOW, BUT A PART OF ME THINKS IT WOULD'VE BEEN FINE TO NEVER REALLY DECLARE IT.



TRANSLATION NOTES

OVERALL

Japanese Buddhism has a complex ranking system for its monks called *soukan* (*sou* meaning "monk," and *kan* implying hierarchy). Monks in this story often address each other by rank.

PAGE 13

Fudou Myou-ou is a wrathful Buddhist deity who scares people into accepting Buddhist teachings and salvation. The "Kongou" part of Umehara's sword's name comes from another name for Fudou used in Japanese esoteric Buddhism- "Joujuu Kongou," or "Everlasting and Unchangeable Diamond."

PAGE 54

The practice of throwing anise onto a mandala to determine an acolyte's patron deity is used by the real-life Shingon Sect.

PAGE 55

The magic word that the Dai-soujou recites to start the ritual- "touka"- literally means "throw flower."

PAGE 98

The "burial mounds" that Keito is visiting traditionally contain the severed heads of feudal warriors (and nothing more).

PAGE 148

In Japanese high schools, graduating senior boys will often give the second buttons of their school uniforms to girls they like. In this scene, one of Tomoharu's fans is upset that instead of the prized button, all she gets is a scrap of shirt.

CORPSE PRINCESS 8

Yoshiichi Akahito

Translation: Caleb D. Cook
Lettering: Bianca Pistillo

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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